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An Exploratory Research into Perpetual Transition: Investigative Journalism Within
the Philippines' Transitional Democracy

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's
Degree in Communications/Journalism

By

Beverly Fontaine

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

September 2024



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Abstract & Keywords

Abstract: This study examines the governmental barriers that impede investigative journalism in the Philippines and explores how these barriers affect the country's status as a transitional democracy. Despite the crucial role of investigative journalism in fostering transparency and accountability, limited research has focused on the connection between these barriers and the democratic processes in the Philippines. This research aims to identify the current and most prominent obstacles faced by investigative journalists in the country, and to assess how these challenges influence its democratic landscape. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study conducts five semi-structured interviews with investigative journalists based in the Philippines. Through critical and thematic analysis, key patterns and themes highlight the journalists' experiences and perceptions of the judicial and governmental restrictions they face. The findings suggest a significant relationship between the suppression of investigative journalism and the weakening of democratic principles, illustrating the impact of press freedom limitations on the country's governance. By integrating the viewpoints of those on the frontlines of investigative journalism, this research provides a comprehensive perspective on how policy decisions and legal frameworks influence media freedom and, by extension, democracy in the Philippines. The study contributes to the broader discourse on media freedom in transitional democracies and advocates for continued dialogue in various fields on safeguarding investigative journalism as a pillar of democratic society.

Keywords: investigative journalism, governmental barriers, Philippines democracy, transitional democracy, press freedom, thematic analysis

Resumo: Este estudo examina as barreiras governamentais que impedem o jornalismo de investigação nas Filipinas e explora como essas barreiras afetam a posição do país como uma democracia em transição. Apesar do papel crucial do jornalismo de investigação na promoção da transparência e responsabilidade, a pesquisa sobre a conexão entre essas barreiras e os processos democráticos nas Filipinas é limitada. Esta pesquisa visa identificar os obstáculos atuais e mais proeminentes enfrentados pelos jornalistas de investigação no país e avaliar como esses desafios influenciam a paisagem democrática. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, o estudo realiza

cinco entrevistas semiestruturadas com jornalistas de investigação das Filipinas. Através de análise crítica e temática, padrões e temas-chave destacam as experiências e percepções dos jornalistas em relação às restrições judiciais e governamentais que enfrentam. Os resultados sugerem uma relação significativa entre a supressão do jornalismo de investigação e o enfraquecimento dos princípios democráticos, ilustrando o impacto das limitações à liberdade de imprensa na governação do país. Ao integrar os pontos de vista daqueles na vanguarda do jornalismo de investigação, esta pesquisa oferece uma perspectiva abrangente sobre como as decisões políticas e o quadro jurídico influenciam a liberdade de imprensa e, por extensão, a democracia nas Filipinas. O estudo contribui para o discurso mais amplo sobre a liberdade de imprensa nas democracias em transição e defende um diálogo contínuo em várias áreas sobre a proteção do jornalismo de investigação como um pilar da sociedade democrática.

Palavras-chave: jornalismo de investigação, barreiras governamentais, democracia nas Filipinas, democracia em transição, liberdade de imprensa, análise temática

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Introduction

Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without all three, we have no shared reality, and democracy as we know it—and all meaningful human endeavors—are dead.

Maria Ressa (2022)¹.

The discussion around the benefits and challenges of journalism has undergone a profound evolution and expansion over the course of many years. This discourse has gathered valuable insights and perspectives from a diverse range of individuals from various fields. Journalists, especially those working in the investigative sector, play a pivotal role in informing and engaging the public on crucial issues. While this is so, journalists continue to face multiple political, economic, and overall governmental challenges. The discussion around the benefits and challenges of journalism is a complex one due to how many factors rely on each other. As the media landscape changes, so too will the role of journalists and the challenges they face, much of which will rely heavily on the decision-making of the government.

The Philippines saw the critical contributions that journalism has made to the shifting tide of its democracy, propelling it forward from complete authoritarian control under the Marcos regime to a democratically considered country. Investigative reports, imperative to the public's perception of the government, have contributed to ousting leaders and exposing corrupt high-profile figures. Democratic elections were restored, and a new constitution was implemented. Since then, the Philippines has been hailed as the "freest press" in Asia, bearing the distinction amongst other countries under authoritarian rule (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2005, para. 4). The growth of a focus on investigative journalism has paralleled the political sphere in the country, allowing for the establishment and growth of centers such as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) in 1989 as well as an expansion of news sites dedicated to efforts of greater accountability.

Despite this progress, media freedom does not seem to be prospering in the country's news climate. The issue remains that the Philippines has not managed to move past this transition into democracy, with various barriers confronting its emergence. While scholars have approached the definition of free press through different contexts, certain global standards remain expected to be

¹ Maria Ressa, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future* (HarperCollins, 2022), p. 8.

met, such as upholding journalistic ethics, pluralism, reasonable access to information, and journalist protection without fear of retribution. The Philippines is commended for its democratic standing in comparison to other Asian countries, yet a significant amount of direct and indirect threats towards journalists persists, countering that narrative. Still yet, there remains a limited number of studies connecting the line between these blatant governmental barriers and the country's transitional democratic status.

This study aimed to analyze the prominent governmental barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines and how they are influencing the country's democratic status. Through five semi-structured interviews with investigative journalists from the Philippines, this dissertation used thematic analysis to identify and connect relevant themes from the interviews and analyzed these inputs in relation to the barriers. Focusing on this region, this study was guided by two main research questions:

RQ1: What are the current and most prominent barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines?

This study also incorporated how the democratic status of the Philippines is involved through this research question:

RQ2: How do the investigative barriers impact the democratic status of the Philippines as a transitional democracy?

In this way, we observed the relationship that investigative journalism has with the democracy of the Philippines. Beyond the academic discourse, this study encompassed the viewpoints of journalists, integrating their perspectives into the dialogue surrounding policymakers and the judicial system. With all this taken into account, a robust and open dialogue about the future of investigative journalism is continued to ensure that it remains a vital part of a democratic society.

Chapter 1: Non-legislative governmental threats to press freedoms in transitional democracies

The conversation around journalism has carved a pivotal space to this day amongst researchers about its impact on society. Journalism maintains its ethics and similar practices in many forms, but it differs within the political climate it serves. Whereas the profession within a consolidated and healthy democracy has more access to overcoming traditional barriers, journalists within a transitional democracy may question their roles and methods to navigate their duties, all while facing institutional and governmental barriers. Understanding journalism through this contextual lens can help explain the mounting pressure that enacts changes in practices and even potential compromises made by the media in such cases.

The role of journalism is crucial in ensuring a proper space for critical discourse, upholding transparency, and maintaining accountability. This chapter delves into the relationship between press freedom and accountability reporting within the context of the Philippines, a transitionally democratic nation that exemplifies the challenges faced by emerging democracies. The Philippines is a compelling case as it works through the delicate balance between the decades-long state influence and its journalistic independence. While the nation's media has historically played a significant role in exposing corruption and promoting change in governmental positions, this environment is also marked by substantial threats to press freedom imposed by the government. By exploring the relationship between the Philippines' democracy and the non-legislative obstacles to investigative reporting, this chapter will highlight the governmental practices and obstacles in investigative journalism that influence the country's democratic trajectory.

1.1. Transitional democracies

Transitional democracies aim for complete democratization, a process which scholars have contested over its determinants (Epstein et.al, 2006). A transitional democracy can be understood as a “hybrid regime where institutions of the old regimes coexist with those of the new state, and authoritarians and democrats often share power” (Shin, 1994 as cited in Jebril et.al, 2013, p. 4). It is during this pivotal phase that a governmental body is transitioning from a previously

authoritarian or authoritarian-like regime to democratic governance, charged with distributing power more equally and locally amongst institutions. These characteristics are typically more or less similar, including political/electoral/economic reforms, addressing press freedom issues, and the development of civil society. Democratization, being the goal of these transitional democracies, can be understood as: “a journey between two ideal points on the political spectrum: closed autocracy at one end and open democracy at the other. In reality, no regime conforms to an ideal type” (Dahl, 1998, p. 36). While the ideal image of democracy is a clean line between a closed autocracy and an open democracy, no transitional democracy follows such a simple path. Institutional reformations made within transitional democracies often rely on established democracies as a guide (Splichal, 2001). However, decisions made by leaders during the transitional period immediately after the change are often made situationally and not from a strategically forward-viewing approach (Vltmer, 2008). Additionally, the effort to reform is often undermined by the efforts of the existing systematic issues within the government, affecting any true progress set to occur and posing the risk of democratic backsliding, a process of a “deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, within any regime” (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 3). Maerz et.al (2020) mention that backsliding often starts with attacks on press freedom and society and eventually impacts electoral processes. A foundationally weak institution can allow for such infringements on the press, which then impact the effort for accountability that the press, the government, and the public all hold to each other. The dependent nature of democratic governments on all its factors is effective in upholding responsibility, but its paradox lies in the issue that if one pillar weakens, its weight is imposed on the others. Such is the case with transitional democracies, where the press acts as an especially crucial overseer of governmental practices. If they are undermined, the balance of accountability is disrupted and the possibility of democratic backsliding is heightened.

The issue with studying democratic transition is its fluctuating nature, holding aspects of the previous regime while attempting to enforce a democratic one. Democratization, as Vltmer (2013) explains, is difficult to study largely because democracy itself is so hard to define. A ‘good’ democracy and its characteristics vary in current research, allowing for the analyzed processes to be just as complex before reaching that stage. The many phases of democratic transition come before the work of democratic consolidation, which is the process of making new democracies secure and strengthening democratic principles on an institutional level

(Schedler, 1998). Rustow (1970) made the important distinction between the theory of democratic transitions and theorizing democratic stability, in which the latter examines the factors that sustain democracy rather than the fluctuation of a democratic transition. It is only when a country reaches the consolidation phase that the theory of democratic stability can be applied, which the Philippines, due to its restless media history, has not yet obtained.

The Philippines' Weak Democracy

The Philippines, though officially labeled a “democracy”, has the potential to be seen as a toxic democracy as explained by Curato (2019), a concept that sees authoritarian tendencies even with the presence of democratic institutions. The state acts as a “sophisticated authoritarianism” in which it enacts its changes through authoritarian means but in a more subtle fashion. This is apparent for journalists in media suppression, through the weaponization of laws or the cultivation of an anti-press culture. This perspective of an inadequate democracy lends to Waisbord’s (2007) theory, in which the author describes *statelessness* as when a state government fails to meet certain requirements to maintain its legitimacy. One of the indicators of statelessness is when there is uncontrolled violence against journalists. The author explains that with statelessness, it is impossible to have functioning democratic journalism due to the many obstacles that prevent a proper journalistic system from being sustained. Even with only partially “stateless” aspects fulfilled, proper democratic journalism is not possible. All the conditions must be met for journalists to operate to their full capacity. This also proves the implications of the cycle in which journalism and democracy are connected, where the erosion of one leads to the erosion of another.

Throughout the tumultuous years of government rule, administrations have varied in form, from the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorship in 1986 by the People Power Revolution to the election of present-day President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. under a transitional democracy in 2022. Ferdinand Marcos even unashamedly called his own rule a “constitutional authoritarianism” (Ronas, 2011, p. 97). Although the country is currently considered democratic, it remains classified as a “flawed democracy”² with a press freedom rating for 2024 in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked 134 out of 180 countries analyzed, a far cry from the positioning of other

² Economist Intelligence. *Democracy Index 2023: Age of conflict*, 2023, p. 27.

democratic countries, especially as it dropped two places from the previous year³. Due to the levels of corruption, influence by the wealthy, and other factors, it has been questioned whether it is appropriate even to call the country a democracy, though to be constituted as such (whether weak, flawed, strong, etc.) would only require fulfilling the basic qualities of a democracy (Putzel, 1999). In other cases, the Philippines has been described as “low-quality” or a “delegation democracy” (Dressel, 2011). The evaluation of this democracy, a consistently negative description, through the Morlino framework (2009) shows that the country remains a “minimalist democracy without sustained quality” (as cited in Dressel, 2011, p. 530). Dressel (2011) examines the country’s democratic quality through characteristics such as *Rule of Law*, *Civil & Political rights* (including freedom of the press, information access, and journalist deaths), and *Equality/Equity*, concluding that the country’s governance falls short of a well-rounded democracy. Scholars such as Ronas (2011) question why the democratization of the country has been stalled since the Marcos regime ended, observing that perhaps the executive hegemony of the presidential power, failing to address the economic and social problems, transfers to the next administration by a lack of accountability. This inadequate governance upholds the Philippines in its place of democratic transition instead of progressing toward a consolidated democracy.

1.2. The Function of the Media System

The media sphere is a heavily researched topic by many scholars branching out to various perspectives (Bourdieu, 1998; Hall, 1997; McLuhan, 1964), yet its societal significance is always acknowledged. The power of media regarding news is often centered in its framing, as it comes from “its ability to define the terms of a debate without the audience realizing it is taking place” (Tankard, 2001, p. 97 as cited in Gronemeyer, 2019, p. 956). The ability to shape the perspective and interpretation of the delivered news is powerfully available to every journalist. Framing, or how parts of stories are purposefully emphasized or not, is not a new area of research and is often analyzed concerning how audiences make decisions (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Tankard, 2001). In transitional democracies, perhaps Gitlin’s (1980) discussion on the political and social power of news framing is most relevant, where he explains that framing

³ RSF Freedom Index 2024. <https://rsf.org/en/index>

reflects the power structures already in place. Hall (1981) clearly emphasizes this point: that media is “precisely representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work” (Hall, 1981 as cited in Gilroy & Gilmore, 2021, p. 90).

To understand the function of press freedom within the Philippines, one must also understand the structure of the country’s media system itself, as the functioning of the media system lends itself greatly to how it is controlled. This raises the important question of whether media freedom promotes democracy, or a stronger democracy promotes freer media, given that media freedom in democratic countries can vary. This case can be examined through the lens of Filipino media revolutions throughout history. The introduction of traditional news media began with the onset of the Spanish Colonial Era, during which print news grew, leading to the political uprising against Spanish rule and for an independent Philippines (Coronel, 2001; Tandoc Jr., 2016). The colonial media direction continued in 1898 to 1946, this time under an American influence who established their military rule and media censorship. The country’s press system, under both Spanish and American rule, suffered total censorship (Teodoro & Kabatay, 2006). Former President Marcos continued this trend of suppression by silencing “government-opposing” journalism outlets in numerous ways from the beginning of his rule in 1965, including ordering the closure of newspaper and broadcasting stations, jailing journalists, and enacting a ‘military censor’ on newspapers. Because of the frequency and institutionalization of the bribery of the press, it was at this time that the term “envelopmental journalism” was born, a play on “developmental journalism”, where journalists receive cash bribes in envelopes (Rodolfo & Salazar, 2007). Despite the rise in these negative aspects of journalism, as the country was no stranger to the revolutionary mindset. The People’s Power Revolution eventually toppled his rule with the aid of the “mosquito press”, with which the fall of the Marcos regime came to an end to many legacy journalism outlets and an influx of new news organizations.

News media reception

The influence of the news is only as strong as its consumers make it, allowing the audience to be a major factor in news decision-making. Investigative journalism shines most brightly through exposés, where the opportunity for positive reformation is high; however, the risk is in the

normalization of such frequent scandals: “When everyone cries wolf, the public loses all interest in accusations of corruption and normalizes it. The very high level of government corruption becomes a normal fact of life” (Sajo, 2003 as cited in Norris, 2010, p. 115). This normalization can have serious consequences as it allows corrupt practices to continue unchecked, eroding trust in institutions and undermining democratic values. Journalists, news organizations, and the public must work to navigate this balance and ensure that the frequency of scandals does not diminish their significance.

Throughout the 19th century, the attitude of Philippine media has been divisive in its approach towards coverage of the government versus the people, a reflection of the country’s state of reorientation in power (Coronel, 2001). Unsurprisingly, within the recent years of the media landscape, popularity in print media has fallen, giving way to digital content (Media Ownership Monitor, n.d.). Many news organizations that began as print news have shifted their focus, partially or entirely, to digital media through online news sites and social media. This has correlated with the trust levels in media, where the most popularly used format still falls under television 91%, with half receiving political news from the radio or the internet (Pulse Asia Research, 2021). This connecting circle affects the state of democracy, given that uninformed citizens do not trust the media to provide them with proper political information, which undermines the journalists’ profession and creates a gap between civic engagement and electoral measures. High levels of trust, on the other hand, promote transparency and increase the number of perspectives within the democratic discourse. Without this, the unfortunate susceptibility for journalists to give in to powerful actors grows.

Journalist-source relations

Given that trust levels by the public are influenced by societal and cultural context, it is important to remember that the relationship between media and power can help us understand the media’s influence on the country’s governance (Downing, 1996). The issue of large or high-profile investors or conglomerates is the effect on the production and distribution of public information, with less competition and diversity of media with media consolidation (Faustino, 2022). Due to this, the hierarchy of media formats (print, television, etc) through the benefits of investments might lead to a greater influence on public reach and opinion and the quality of the

work may be impacted, as “strategic choices were often made out of concern for short-term gain rather than long-term sustainability of the news enterprise and the social needs of audiences and society” (Levy & Nielson, 2013, p. 17). In addition to wealthy owners of news agencies, the reliance of journalists on government entities for source material hinders both their independence and occasionally their credibility (Cook, 1998). The issue of pseudo-events (Tandoc & Skoric, 2010) (in which events are staged by public relations or directly by government entities through interviews, press releases, etc.) traps journalists in a comfortable method of newsgathering, which is made more easily alterable by its source, rather than allowing for more “spontaneous” news. It has the potential to affect not only news quality but the consistency of the news flow, impacting the prioritization headlines in the news cycle and therefore leaving a greater risk of “setting” the agenda (Tandoc & Skoric, 2010). Relying solely on one type of source can contain the choice of story as well as the creativity of the journalist.

The Philippines' media system, modeled after that of the United States, is largely controlled by several wealthy families (Rosales, 2006). The biggest Filipino newspapers (such as the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Manila Bulletin*, and the *Philippine Star*) are all owned by families with branching business interests (Gloria, 2000). This method of ownership by wealthy families is advantageous in its source income to maintain the news organization, yet its perils lie in the possible influence that high-handed figures possess on the organization's values (Coronel, 2001). Despite these risks, not all news organizations succumb to the influence of their benefactors in information or income. Nonprofit and independent news organizations such as the Filipino news site *Vera Files* make a point of carefully examining the contributions that fund them to preserve their journalistic quality and integrity. Through their independence, the news outlet can pursue investigative stories without external sway from benefactors as well as offer a greater range in diversity of perspectives. Research centers such as the *Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism* dedicate their research to effective and honest journalism, whose independence allows for freedom from commercial pressures, promoting a sense of integrity and transparency in their work. The outlet oversaw a guide to how the government works and its abuses of power which was created in an attempt to educate journalists on how to navigate it (Balgos, 2003). These measures might, in effect, encourage more civic participation and build bridges between knowledge gaps that previously existed for both professionals and other citizens.

1.3. Press freedom

Press freedom is often perceived as a central pillar of a healthy democracy, serving to protect and provide the truth through transparency and accountability. The ability to rely on the insurance of press freedoms allows journalists to freely and comfortably perform their duties, leaving more room for criticism and a diversity of perspectives. This freedom of expression is so intertwined with human rights and the state of a free country that many countries around the world signed the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which states: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article XIX). This highlights the importance of press freedom being so paramount to a society in which human rights are respected. Stiglitz (2024) associates press freedom with the higher probability that citizens’ social needs will be met, emphasizing that the better the press standards, the better the society.

This perspective of a correlation between press freedom and civil society satisfaction follows the idea that the conversation around press freedom depends greatly on the state of the democracy. The question of press freedom, while highly conferred amongst pundits and scholars alike, differs within the context of transitional democracies. Fully consolidated democratic countries benefit not only from legislative support for journalists but have maintained a culture of high regard for freedom of expression, making it easier to maintain the attitude of respect for the profession. In comparison, transitional countries are still developing their democratic practices with less time to normalize or standardize them and therefore are often interfered with by government censorship and restrictions. Because transitional democracies are in the earlier stages of institutionalization and more susceptible to political instability in their foundation, press freedom in these democracies often faces greater and more frequent challenges than consolidated ones.

Within the scholarly conversation of press freedom in transitional democracies, there are relatively few empirical studies conducted connecting press freedom and transitional democracies, though the interrelatedness between each is particularly relevant during a democratic transition (Gunther, 2000). The possible explanation for this, however, may be due to the evolving nature of democratic transitions, leaving less possibility for stable research in this

field. A recurring theme across research undertaken on press freedom in transitional democracies is the prevalence of state capture, self/government censorship, and government intimidation as primary threats to press freedom within transitional democracies (Fontaine, 2024, unpublished systematic review).

Media often tends to adapt to political change in terms of their roles and their systems, regardless of the stage of transition (Voltmer, 2013). However, throughout the transition, journalists' expected roles include watchdog and civic roles to establish "a sense of democratic citizenship among the population" (Mellado & Dalen, 2017, p. 246). Voltmer (2008) views the media-political relationship in a democratic transition through the lens of four dimensions: *media market development*, in which interests can create media hegemony, *the role of the state*, where legal interference can impede proper journalism progress, *political parallelism*, discussing the media's relationship with political parties or institutions, and *professionalization*, emphasizing internal journalistic practices. In this way, we can see how the media is approached in terms of the institutional reformation way of current administrations in a cultural context, with press freedom relying on aspects from all four dimensions. The media is only as effective on democratic transitions as it is contingent on these factors.

Press freedom should aim to, as Voltmer (2013, p. 12) states, "enable a robust and inclusive public debate, which is at the heart of a healthy and sustainable democracy". Leeson (2008) supports the idea of the free press as a necessity to a politically competent society, stressing that the less media freedom is available, the less political knowledge the public will have. The extent to which the press takes the side of the ordinary citizen, as the homogenization thesis explores and expands upon, positing that journalistic practices will all lead to a point in which "reporters take the side of ordinary citizens against political and economic elite" (Lauk, 2009, p. 69 as cited in Mellado & Dalen, 2017, p. 245), is heavily contested amongst scholars due to a supposed western-oriented bias (Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Mellado & Dalen, 2017; Voltmer, 2013). Critics of the view that the press can be free and objective derived from *Marx & Engels* (1976), which also indirectly questions the role of journalists as the fourth estate while being a part of an elite-controlled system. This remains a highly relevant question in a transitional Filipino democracy to this day.

Filipino press freedom

The Philippines was amongst the many countries that signed the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that emphasized the importance of free opinion and expression; yet it is one of the many that do not entirely abide by it. Press freedom in the Philippines has shifted with the tide of political and technological waves, affecting the country's public and political decision-making. The country's turbulent press history and restrictions, lending an atmosphere of sensitivity on the subject, have not prevented the press from making significant contributions to changes in Filipino democracy during times of crisis. It has, however, significantly informed how the press approaches its internal practices.

The critical moments in the history of former President Marcos and Duterte's authoritarian reign were covered extensively and effectively by news outlets. However, perhaps what lies more difficult after this effort is the ability to continue the consistent coverage even as the current government structure hails less like an authoritative rule and more as a democracy. Because the 2016 administration deployed traditional and frequent ways of media repression, such as calling some outlets "fake news" and utilizing other anti-media rhetoric (Ragragio, 2022), the conversation was very much focused on the "government vs the media". This gave a clear indication of the government's position towards the media, allowing for an extra incentive for public participation and calling for measures in favor of the press. A galvanization of the public requires an incentive, after all.

By contrast, the newest government administration has had a seemingly different public relationship than the previous rule. Rappler⁴, an online news site that prides itself in its critical and investigative reporting, was a prevalent player in the exposure of many controversial authority figures, especially of former President Duterte. Rappler's reporters, after a tense relationship with the Duterte regime, were allowed closer reporting on the government, established during Marcos Jr.'s administration. In addition, President Marcos Jr. has used friendlier rhetoric during press conferences in support of the news media, a sharp contrast from the previous administration. Journalist Clarist Zablan wrote for News 5 that after the murder of a Filipino radio journalist, President Marcos Jr. stated: "Under my lead, we will support and protect the rights of the media as they efficiently perform their duties" (Zablan, 2022, para. 12).

⁴Rappler, *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/>

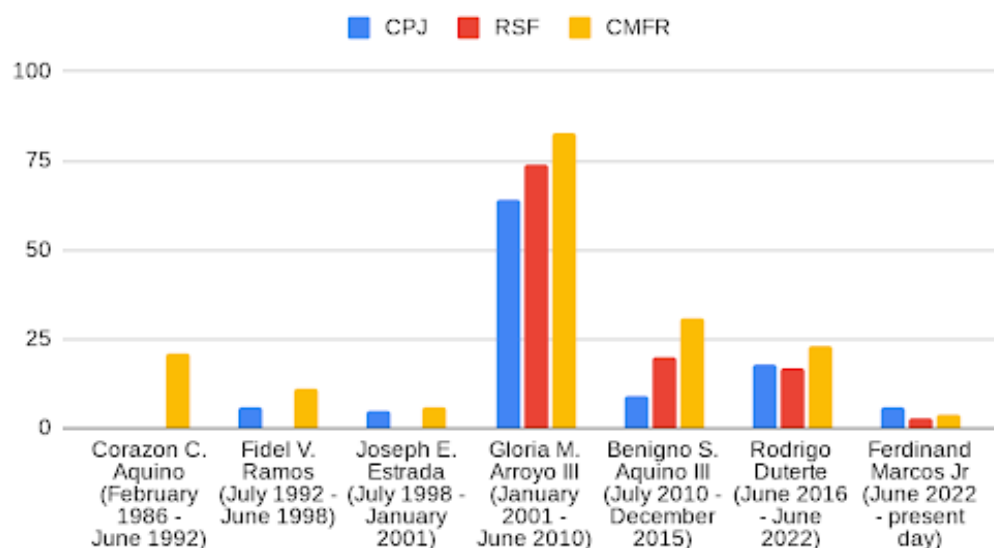
The friendlier actions and promising statement possibly previewed a hopeful new future with serious journalist protection measures. However, the seemingly shifted relationship between the two entities remains complicated as many external and internal issues persist.

Impunity

One of these factors is inaction, which proves just as consequential as harmful action: despite the numerous violent attacks on journalists, the attitude of the government and the culture of the exemption has created an air of impunity over the years. Impunity, as stated by the *United Nations in the UN Plan Of Action On The Safety Of Journalists And The Issue Of Impunity*, can be defined as “the failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice, perpetuates the cycle of violence against journalists” (UNESCO, 2012, para. 1.3). This not only affects the journalists themselves but the audience’s access and right to information as well, as they “represent attacks not only on the victims but on freedom of expression itself, and on the right of everyone to seek and receive information and ideas” (Organization of American States [OAS], 2011, para. 6). Voltmer (2013) backs this position, elaborating on the idea that the whole communication process is affected within the discussion of press freedom which affects the heart of a healthy democracy: rounded public debate. The inaction of the highest national authority acts as an insult and a threat to all actors involved in the flow of information.

Impunity within the sphere of Filipino journalism is perhaps most aggressively visible during the Maguindanao Massacre, in which the island of Maguindanao’s province town mayor had 32 journalists and media workers brutally murdered (Arao, 2016). Although this incident preceded the creation of the Presidential Task Force of Media Security in 2016 and led the executive director of this task force to state that the supposed “‘culture of impunity’ against journalists in the country has finally come to an end” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020, para. 4), the overall outcome of the incident was far from the truth. Many of the convicted have still not been arrested and a significant number of suspects have not been prosecuted. This incident could have the effect of the public losing trust in the government and its judiciary processes. Given that this was one of the deadliest attacks on journalists worldwide, the level of impunity surrounding the situation is especially concerning. Concerted efforts should have been taken to condemn the act to the highest degree possible.

Figure 1: Statistics on Work-Related Killings According to Administration



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Sources of basic data: Data extracted from CPJ cites these statistics under "motive confirmed", similarly, RSF lists these statistics only if RSF has linked their death to their journalistic activity and excludes unconfirmed motives.⁶

Even without considering the numbers from the Maguindanao Massacre, the number of journalist deaths since the end of Marcos' administration is still significantly high. Data is not provided on journalist-related killings under Marcos Sr. from all three of the sources analyzed, however; the regime did see some of which were documented such as the killings of Demosthenes "Demy" Dingcong, Florante "Boy" de Castro, and Geoffrey Siao⁷. The first

⁵ Table 1 explaining statistics on work-related killings of journalists and media workers according to administration (1986 to 2015). Data pulled and re-organized from Arao, D. A. (2016, May 31). Press freedom, governance, and impunity: The alarming case of the Philippines. In The 4th International Conference on Magsaysay Awardees: Good Governance and Transformative Leadership in Asia (pp. 225-234).

⁶ Note: Data was pulled independently from each database and aggregated together in the chart. CPJ database provides data only from 1992; RSF database provides data only from 2001; CMFR database provides data only from 1986.

⁷ Human Rights Violations Victims Memorial Commission, 2021. <https://hrvvmemcom.gov.ph/the-marcos-regime-and-the-making-of-a-subservient-philippine-press-part-ii-2/>

murder took place after Demy exposed government and military abuses, the second was killed after reporting suspicious government activities, and the third was killed after releasing an expose on government officials. These deaths all share the same profession behind the person: investigative journalist. The number of journalist killings since President Marcos's reign ended in 1986 has not declined continuously, as would be expected from a transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one; instead, it has steadily continued with each administration, as seen in Figure 1. Work-related killings increased significantly during Arroyo's administration and, while decreasing in Aquino III's administration, it was still higher than in the three subsequent administrations after Marcos Sr.'s rule.

The CPJ's 2015 Global Impunity Index also ranked the Philippines as fourth in unsolved journalist murders, stating that it "remains the only country within the top five impunity offenders not engulfed by conflict and acute political instability"⁸. The inability or unwillingness to resolve these murders adds to the immunity that anti-press actors are granted, suggesting a significant flaw in the justice system. Because the violence is not attributed to external factors such as war or widespread conflict, it draws attention to the issues of the internal systemic roots of governance.

Even during the administration of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., a large democratic shift forward since his father's regime, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility has reported 75 cases of violations against journalists, outnumbering the previous President Duterte's number of 41 per year⁹. RSF reported that in 2023 from the months of January to November alone, 36 journalists were killed and 497 detained¹⁰. When perpetrators are not condemned, it might embolden them to continue targeting journalists with impunity, creating a hostile environment for free expression and critical journalism. This impunity has been instilled and systematically benefited from to create an atmosphere of self-censorship by any state-related actors (Harrison & Pukallus, 2018). This can include whistleblowing, which serves as a tool that is largely important in breaking new stories, to be discouraged by the impunity of violence against information-seekers and tellers.

⁸ (Rappler, para. 8, 2015). <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/108629-somalia-philippines-global-impunity-index-2015/>

⁹ CMFR and NUJP stats from 2023 as mentioned in PCIJ: <https://pcij.org/2023/05/03/2023-state-of-press-freedom-in-the-philippines/>

¹⁰ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 2023.

The problems that have terrorized the journalism profession are perhaps normalized to such a degree that it does not make major headlines as it did before. Because the appearance of the relationship between the two bodies is not as apparently severe as before, the push for constant coverage may be less demanded, even if the need is more vital than ever:

Murder of journalists appear to be acute in transitional societies, where press freedom is high but corruption is rife, the legal system is weak, and other institutional characteristics allow this form of violence to escalate. (Aguilar, Mendoza, and Candelaria 2014, p. 652-653).

This normalcy is challenged by a culture of resistance, which would ideally expose the “oppressive reality in society” (Arao, 2016, p. 232), but is faced with a multitude of obstacles that invariably hinder their progress. Because of these obstacles, dissent cannot be organized nor encouraged, inhibiting the normalization of such behaviors as would be expected in a healthy democracy.

Besides outright violence, other scare tactics have also persisted such as indirect threats, made widespread by social media. Such threats, such as the red-tagging of journalists, can lead to violence. Red-tagging, described as wrongfully accusing and associating individuals with the National People’s Army¹¹, is prevalent in the Philippines. A recent example includes Inday Espina-Varona, a veteran journalist, who was linked to several communist groups through a Facebook post¹². Examples such as Espina-Varona’s show that while in situations such as these, the government does not take active measures against journalists, their passivity towards justice for these journalists allows for an unabashed culture of impunity to grow. This builds a greater opportunity for self-censorship by states and other state-related actors (Harrison and Pukallus, 2018). This chilling effect highlights the importance of substantial investigative reporting to hold the powerful accountable.

¹¹ Getz, A. (2023, May 16). In Marcos Jr.'s Philippines, milder tone belies harsh media reality. Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2023/05/in-marcos-jr-s-philippines-milder-tone-belies-harsh-media-reality/>

¹² Rappler, “Inday Espina-Varona on NUJP Threats, Lumad Issues,” Rappler, September 15, 2015, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/106501-inday-espina-varona-nujp-threat-lumad-issues/>.

Chapter 2: Investigative Reporting & Accountability

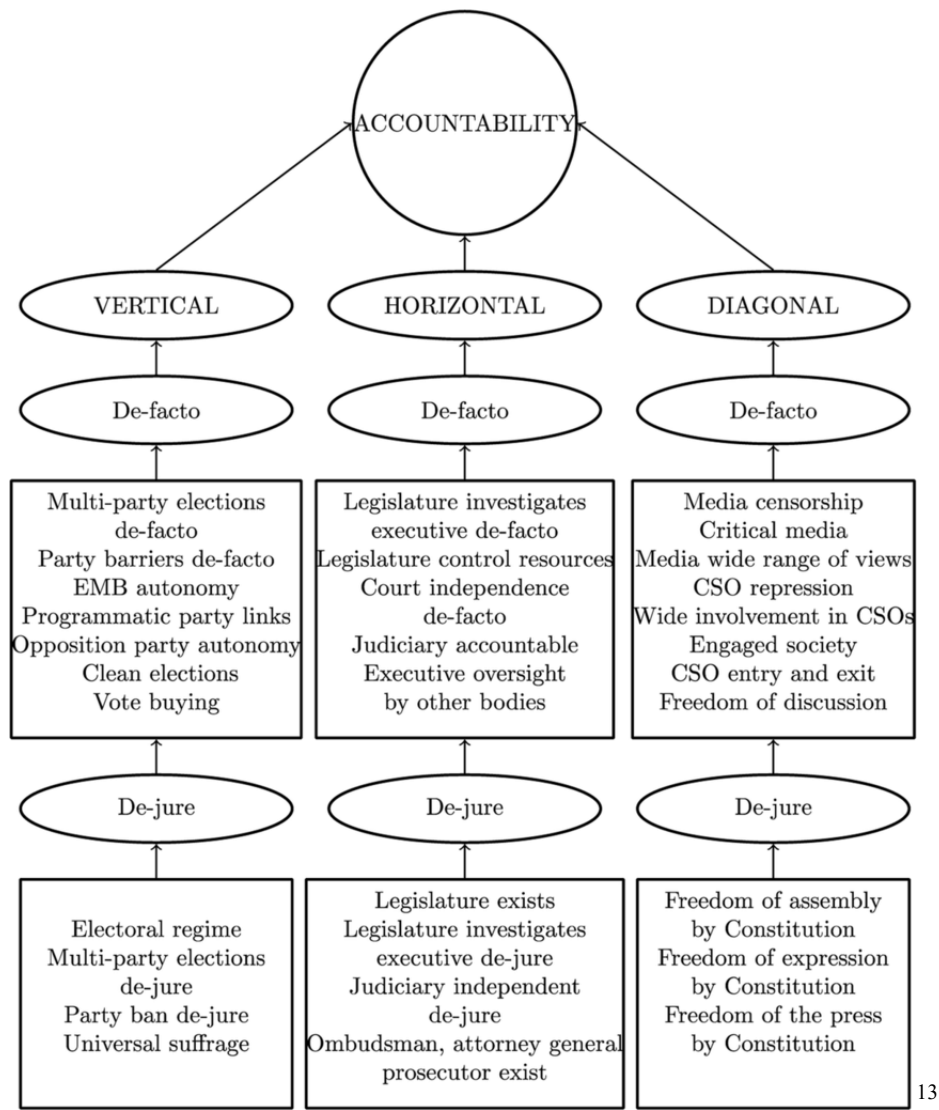
The process of accountability takes into account all factors, including the political environment in which it is taking place. Gouldner (1976) defines it in the broader sense:

To be 'accountable' means that one can be constrained to reveal what one has done and why one has done it; thus, the action and the reasons for it are open to a critique by strangers who have few inhibitions about demanding justification and reasonable grounds. (Gouldner, 1976, p. 102)

This method of accountability, in effect, works in relation to critique only as much as the current government administration allows. Scholar James S. Ettema (2007) analyzes journalism through the lens of the political theory of *deliberative democracy*, which describes a type of governance that is an equal and reciprocation relationship between citizens and their government. The relevance of this lens of journalism is stressed in the idea that in order for in-depth discourse between the two entities to occur, accountability journalism must be present in fostering political transparency. Mechkova et.al (2019) emphasize the weight of political institutions on press freedoms and where formal and informal influences stand within the realm of accountability. Figure 2 demonstrates where media accountability stands in accordance with political accountability factors. This allows us to determine that governmental actions, both legislative and non-legislative, greatly impact how the media functions and the state of governance within the country. The factors to hold leaders accountable are divided into *vertical accountability*, a system including proper electoral practices, *horizontal accountability*, which involves state powers employing legislation to keep checks and balances amongst systems, and *diagonal accountability*, a blend of the previous two types of accountability whereby legislation and other direct means such as critical journalism to hold the powerful accountable. The de-Jure refers to legal means of accountability and de-Facto refers to practical ones, as both work as a whole to influence the democratic status. De-Jure factors can legally protect investigative journalists when their investigative work involves stories regarding high-profile actors. De-facto components can include factors such as public pressure and action. When governmental barriers affect the horizontal accountability sphere, the legal restrictions on press freedom disable journalism outlets from effectively enhancing the de-jure and de-facto components of diagonal

accountability. Obstacles from simply the diagonal sphere of accountability could include censorship through legislation or other non-legal means.

Figure 2: Accountability Sequence



¹³Figure from: Mechkova, Valeriya & Lührmann, Anna & Lindberg, Staffan. (2019). The Accountability Sequence: from De-Jure to De-Facto Constraints on Governments. Studies in Comparative International Development. 54. 10.1007/s12116-018-9262-5.

With a greater imposition of censorship comes a risk of a loss of one of the most important outcomes of investigative journalism: the accountability effect of high-profile actors such as politicians and elites. This includes not only parties that have no interest in the journalist creating the story, but those investors and influencers as well, as it is crucial for the media to “treat their various stakeholders responsibly so that journalism can fulfill its manifold social functions without external control” (McQuail, 2013 as cited in Fengler, 2019, p. 2). As Hodges (1986) succinctly explains, when someone is responsible for something, the reasonable next step would be that someone is accountable for something. The media, in this case, would be responsible *for* producing proper journalism, and being accountable *to* the public. Media accountability in particular is defined as “any non-state means of making media responsible towards the public” (Bertrand, 2000, p. 108). The types of accountability reporting that could be instrumental in doing so include information requests, collaborative reporting, and online media accountability; the latter of which scholars are hypothesizing might be more advantageous than traditional methods due to its wide range of accessibility and visibility (Deuze, 2005; Cheruiyot, 2017). A constant output of investigative reports could allow officials to develop greater customization of being held under a critical eye.

The word ‘journalist’ is rarely discussed in academia without the accompaniment of the term ‘watchdog’. Although the watchdog role is commonly supported by many scholars as a large purpose within the profession, some critics view the profession more cynically. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) outlines the *field*, which analyzes how each entity operates within the domain. The *field* here can be analyzed through the lens of media, in which journalists must navigate the power dynamics of several external factors influencing the profession. He critiqued journalism as being too heavily influenced by external pressures, including the desire to make the news more palatable to the public, which may affect the depth of the report (Bourdieu, 1998). The influences of not only authoritative figures but of public expectation itself can impact the critical nature of news media, creating a culture of normalization of such type of news. In its paradoxical effect, the news media and societal forces attempt to influence and appease each other, as Bourdieu states, “The journalistic field represents the world in terms of a philosophy that sees history as an absurd series of disasters which can be neither understood nor influenced” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 8). The author then discusses the *habitus*, of which can be understood as the professionalization and internal behaviors of journalism. This includes the overall practices, culture, and behavior

within the profession. The capitals that are used to gain or affect power and status within the media field, can be understood as economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. In the context of investigative journalism, the *economic capital* often used for leverage against journalism outlets is the financial support that larger media outlets experience with big investors and smaller ones are disadvantaged. The *cultural capital* can be seen as the internal skills and professionalization brought to their reporting. The *social capital* can be discussed in perhaps two ways: the alliances made in terms of global support to the protection of the profession, or the upheld connections to sources that bolster groundbreaking stories. Finally, the *symbolic capital* can be seen as the credibility that the profession maintains, often weakened by the anti-press actions made around it.

These concepts of *habitus* and *capital* are relevant in accountability reporting, as the dynamics between them are often what influences the results of the investigative report. We see the influence of *habitus* on the quality of the report, through the ethical decisions made by journalists. The integrity of their profession is held up by their commitment to proper internal practices. When this is compromised, as discussed by the “envelopmental” side or source-bribery issue of Filipino journalism, the accountability report is compromised as well. In accountability reporting, the *capital* takes shape in the resources and influence that are used in the field, such as whistleblowers for reports involving high-profile actors. Through this theoretical perspective, we can understand that both the dynamics within the *field*, the internal professional *habitus*, and the resources of the *capital* all work together to create a state of accountability reporting.

Depletion of critical journalism

The field of journalism is determined by how well its capitals interact with each other but can also be greatly impacted by external players. Direct and indirect governmental obstacles not only decrease the actual quantity of investigative reports but their quality as well, impacting the journalists’ voice. Bertrand (2000) describes media criticism as a particular type of journalism that focuses on the news media, presenting their critical analysis for the public. This creates a space for critical journalists to act, as Hayes (2008) notes about journalism in the United States, as a “fifth estate”. The critical nature of journalism is essentially the defining aspect of an investigative report, commenting where need be and encouraging the public to think critically as

well. Consequential actions to critical thinking can dissuade journalists from pursuing or writing honestly and critically about necessary issues, creating an atmosphere of complete self-censorship at worst. A culture of constructive criticism can be healthy for a democratic culture, built by the normalization of feedback and serious consideration of how to change society for the better.

In addition to an accepted culture of criticism, the political and social reforms that are often associated with in-depth reports may suffer from a lack thereof. According to Balkin (1999), media pressure can create a more transparent political system in several ways: *informational transparency*, or allowing the public to understand the workings of the government, *participatory transparency*, or involving them in policy decisions, and finally *accountability transparency*, where the authority figures can be held accountable. Because journalism informs the public, a critically informed public aids in bridging different communities, whether in social class, race, or nationality. Without this, misinformation and sensationalism can grow, and social divisions can be exacerbated with an increase in political polarization. During such moments, high-standard internal practices of journalism are particularly important to ensure good governance.

What we refer to in terms of “good governance” in this paper is essentially a “two-way process that seeks to involve all members of “civil society” in the effective running of the state” (James, 2006, p. 11). In this way, it most closely resembles a fully democratic country, held accountable in vertical, horizontal, and diagonal aspects. The ultimate purpose of good governance, therefore, is to improve the overall health of a country in every aspect, through improving the lives of its citizens. Norris (2010) expands upon the idea of good governance to the media, in which their role as watchdogs and gatekeepers of information, properly filtering and distributing information about matters that concern to public, ensures that good governance is performed by the government. In relation to the enforcement of good governance, Coronel (2010) notes that the intention behind the initial watchdog report matters not so much as the conclusive interests it serves.

Accountability in the Philippines

While a progression in governmental accountability since the Marcos Sr. regime is undeniable, the current Marcos Jr. presidency has continued to be held to account by news outlets. Media outlets like Rappler and Vera Files have published investigative reports on the administration's human rights abuses and criticized their policies. Rappler released a report in 2024 detailing the progress of the Marcos administration in their second year.¹⁴ Providing the public with the comparison between the promises that the President makes and the actions that are taken allows the audience to act as an alternate watchdog with the media. It also provides a good critical viewpoint of which the government's policies and actions that they can act upon. This is done with risk to the Filipino outlets, as open criticism of the government has not been historically met with appreciation. However, their determination to continue holding the administrations accountable is a testament to their resilience and dedication to democracy.

2.1. Practices in investigative journalism

The form of journalism that most encourages and enables this type of discussion is investigative journalism, as it can uncover and analyze veiled truths of all entities, from average citizens to significant public figures alike. The mission of uncovering the truth can lead investigative journalists to expose corruption even in the highest levels of government, with direct causation seen between higher press freedom and lower corruption (Brunetti & Weder, 2003) proving that the role of investigative journalism is crucial, especially concerning the exercise of power (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hunt, 2012). The issues that investigative journalists trail relentlessly allow for a positive circular impact on the government, as “weak horizontal accountability leads to bad governance” (Ronas, 2011, p. 101). The practice of “investigation”, however, should be a critical part of any type of journalism, thus denying investigative journalism a unique and delegatory method separate from other reporting. However, the link between investigative journalism, the government, and the public contributes to its potential definition as “the process of finding, distilling, and analyzing the information that is the media's commodity also ensure its political role, the core of its self-definition as the Fourth Estate” (Schultz, 1998, p. 2). The difference between investigative journalism and regular reporting is that investigative journalism “depends

¹⁴Rappler, “Marcos Jr.'s Second Year: A Look at His Promises and Their Progress,” Rappler, September 22, 2023, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/marcos-jr-second-year-promises-tracker-status-progress-update/>.

on trained journalists, supportive editors, and a substantial budget” (Street, 2011, p. 193). This, in addition to critical, in-depth topics, shapes an investigative journalist.

The hierarchy of influences on journalism has been studied by many scholars (Hanitzsch et.al, 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The ranking of influences may vary depending on the location, such as Western versus non-Western democracies. Findings by Hanitzsch et.al (2010) revealed that in countries with lower levels of press freedom, journalists deem political influences as more important than in countries with lower press freedom and higher democratic progress. This is perhaps connected to the fact that political barriers, as well as aid, are more influential on journalism in countries where their power is less prominent, as their profession holds more weight and respect in a democratic culture. The hierarchy within journalism is reflective of society’s overall media culture, influenced by the political status of the country. This can lead to positive or negative advancements of and impacts from investigative journalism, depending on the coherence of internal and external elements.

The positive influence of investigative journalism can only reach so far with proper practices within the profession. Watchdog journalism, in which the fourth estate model posits investigative journalism, can aim to scrutinize and investigate public institutions to provide information that is of public concern (Bennett & Serrin, 2005, p. 169). Major practices of investigative journalists include the aim by disclosing the wrongdoings of the investigated persons to the public. This role demands following the flow of technological and social change within the media environment and an adaptation of its approach, leading to alternative styles such as collaborative journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). However, such demands inevitably lead to an increase of concerns within the profession.

Issues in Filipino Investigative Journalism

The history of journalism in the Philippines has left the status of the profession convoluted over the years. Many scholars have argued that post-Marcos, the rise of investigative journalism centers and reporting has given prominence and value to the profession, shaping it positively and leading it to a natural incline. However, there are many indicators that journalism in the Philippines has far from reached its peak. Cases against journalists created from direct governmental impact, such as those against Filipino news organization *Rappler* CEO and

founder Maria Ressa of fraud and tax evasion, have persisted and made global headlines due to the implications for the state of journalism today (Talambong, 2021). Ressa, known for standing up to government officials and other anti-press actors, won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 for her continuous efforts in favor of journalism (Ressa, 2022). Perhaps one of the few positive effects of the continuous coverage of Ressa's fight for journalism is its effectiveness in keeping the audience's attention on important matters of the government's role in the profession. This exposure of governmental obstacles for such a notable name as Maria Ressa invites more critical eyes upon serious journalism, instead of focusing on unserious and non-credible stories, an issue that tears the profession apart from the inside, out.

Celebrity Culture

Despite the significant impact of investigative journalism on the government, practices in Filipino newsrooms leave much room for improvement. The practice of investigative journalism is not only as effective as the government's policies and how the media market functions (Stetka & Örnebring, 2013), but also how internal practices affect journalist quality. The internal issues of tabloidization of news persist, weakening its credibility and focus (Gloria, 2000; Radiamoda, 2023). This obsession with "celebrity culture" permeates not only the interest of the audience and production of news but also contributes to how the audience receives political information as well, as politicians can rely on celebrities to spread the word and essentially "promote" their platform (Radiamoda, 2023). This has also been amplified by the prevalence of social media and new technologies. The news outlets' efforts to maintain readership and a steady income with material with strings attached might surpass their ethical obligation towards responsible journalism. Due to this, the prioritization of the media on topics such as these undermines the journalistic role of the "watchdog" as well as amplifies the glorification and societal importance placed on celebrities, diluting the public discourse towards important decision-making in a healthy democracy. The diversion in the attention of the public from issues directly impacting their democracy, such as corruption and human rights abuses, halts the progression of democracy made through the media sphere.

Not only does the focus on non-newsworthy stories impact what stories are *not* being told, it tarnishes the reputation of the outlets as well. Public trust relies on the accuracy and impact that

journalism has, therefore, with this in question the outlet could be deemed as unreliable, such as tabloids are often considered. Journalists work to build the trust of the public with every story that is told so that the expectation that they will provide accurate information in their interest will be indisputable. However, in a highly competitive environment, this work is aimed more toward the desire to push media consumption, which then leads to further sensationalism of the news.

Competition

Another major issue regarding investigative journalism is the competition in the market itself. Herzog (2022) writes about the tension between ethical standards and the competitive nature of the journalism industry, in which it is difficult to maintain a balance between the two. The author notes that amongst these standards should be a rethinking of framing, headlines, and tone in news segments, that of which is often altered to the competitive pressures of the industry to lure consumers in. In the Philippines, social change and a fiercely competitive industry (Coronel, 2008; Jesus, 2007) allowed for investigative reports to flourish, as was evident after the fall of the Marcos regime. However, certain journalist values shifted, gearing more towards the circulation numbers than the stories themselves (Jesus, 2007). Due to this rise in demand, a multitude of young journalist voices arose with an inconsistency between their and “older” journalist perspectives, low pay and lack of training eventually led them to leave the profession behind (Gloria, 2000; Coronel, 2001). Staffing issues such as these, in terms of downsizing, usually correlate with a decline in performance as well (Kim, 2003; Reinardy, 2012). This intense market allows for more news organizations to produce less expensive and less serious news stories, impacting their credibility (Karadimitriou et.al, 2022) as well as the quality of the reports themselves, creating more “homogeneous reporting and programming” (Coronel, 2001: 118). It is even more prominent in developing democracies, such as the Philippines, to have proper funding for serious training and reporting (Lamat, 2007). This funding issue can be exacerbated by opposing governments, for example, during President Marcos’ authoritarian rule, he paid movie advertisers to withhold publishing their ads in the newspaper *Manila Times* and President Estrada threatened to pull out government ads from the newspaper *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* after he was exposed in a scandal (Jopson, 2013). Placing personal image over ethical means of their governmental position is nothing new, however; consistent interceptive

measures such as these lead to greater uncertainty in the profession, which could propel some journalists to take more unscrupulous measures.

Corruption

Thus arises another key issue of journalistic ethics, as corruption remains prevalent in the media sphere. A professional approach to journalism would include refraining from political interests as well as investor interests (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), however; reporters are said to be often offered money by their sources, in which some cases are accepted (Gloria, 2000). In a desperate time and demanding market, some journalists might feel pressured to accept such bribes in exchange for an exclusive story that would put their headline on the front page. Additionally, as Sheila Coronel (2000) discusses, the Philippines' traumatic past between the government and the press contributes to a possible hesitancy for news media to challenge big-name actors, such as authoritative figures, making it easier to pursue more lucrative and simple stories. In effect, these compromised ethical pressures negatively impact the quality of investigative stories.

These actions defy the ethical responsibility that journalists have to the public, as defined in the *Social Responsibility theory*, where they are expected to produce accurate information without any government control (Gunaratne et.al, 1996). Filipino scholars and journalists began using the term "developmental journalism", where Chalkley, who coined the term, explains that "You must get your readers to realise how serious the development problem is, to think about the problem, to open their eyes to the possible solutions - to punch that hole in the vicious circle" (Gunaratne et.al, 1996, p. 98). In this way, journalists maintain professional integrity and credibility while promoting transparency and accountability. Without following this theory, journalists may find themselves in an unpredictable situation of a lack of public trust or an increase in public outrage against the profession. Following this theory is a step in positively contributing to the democratic process through actionable and ethical journalism so that media organizations can provide mechanisms to improve the profession, when necessary, but is only possible through independent media. It has been argued by organizations such as UNESCO that a global ethical approach should be taken by journalism outlets, to ensure the same standards in upholding proper practices (James, 2006). This aim recognizes that the challenges that journalists face are not entirely unique to a particular country; rather, the globally shared struggles could

provide a sense of solidarity and collective action to promote press freedom and democratic values worldwide.

Impact on Job security

One prominent struggle of those globally shared is employment stability in journalism. As we have discussed, journalists and their outlets face numerous retaliative efforts by the elite and governmental actors they expose. If the unstable competitive market and the encouragement to self-censor were not bad enough, journalists must deal with the weight of their responsibility to the public being threatened as well. The culmination of a lack of respect for their profession, anti-press rhetoric by the government, and a general culture against critical journalism leads to an impact in not only their image but their job security as well. Beck (1992) discusses our society as one now governed by risk, where the employer holds a greater advantage over the individual employee. In the media environment, if this is not properly managed, it can create a more blurred transparency process. The heightened elite media ownership in the Philippines could exacerbate this, becoming a significant threat to journalists. Scholars (Gollmitzer, 2014; Phillips et.al, 2010) note that the hiring conditions of journalists significantly inform the quality of their work, as they aim to protect their jobs and reputations even more in the short span of employment. In effect, journalists may not enforce their watchdog role as intensely.

The importance of investigative journalism is rendered irrelevant if informal anti-press measures inhibit their progress and perhaps even more so through judicial means. Beyond such prevalent governmental behaviors and internal issues within Filipino journalism, we will see in the next chapter how certain legislative barriers further impede their ability to fulfill their crucial role in upholding press freedom and democracy, creating consequences for the journalists and the state of democracy.

Chapter 3: Regulatory Capture in Transitional Democracies

Following a story poses many challenges for a journalist under normal circumstances, from verifying sources to accessing subject records, all while facing resistance from either the sources themselves or those in charge. The imposition of power by the government against journalists comes in various forms, threatening the access and protection needed for investigative journalists through legal or extra-legal action. Because governments have vast resources to suppress the journalistic voice, performing and fulfilling the journalist watchdog function may prove especially challenging. These restraints aid in painting the larger picture of the governmental state's impact on the press and vice versa.

A particularly challenging landscape for journalists to navigate is the legislative barriers that impede their reporting. Investigative journalism, at its most effective, can have the power to contribute to congressional and judicial investigations (Waisbord, 2002). Dahl's *pluralistic theory of democracy* indicates that 'freedom of expression' and 'alternative sources of information' make up democracy as a whole (Dahl, 1998). However, this conception of a liberal democracy is heavily dependent on policies that allow for its realization. Restrictive and imposing laws on information and other content regulation measures allow the government to control the narrative in their favor and protect their interests, which can in turn often negatively impact the state of the press. Regulatory capture is a perspective of media capture, which we have previously discussed as prevalent in transitional democracies, in which comes the "use of the governmental power of inspection over media professionals" (Faris et.al, 2023, p. 289). This is prevalent in information control through various legislative measures over access and the questioning of the validity of the journalistic profession, supporting the heavily researched *theory of democratic transition*, or *transition theory*, in which the complex process of transition is characterized by various actors and challenges before reaching the consolidation stage (Diamond et.al, 1988; O'Donnel & Schmitter, 1986; Voltmer, 2013). This theory is relevant in how previous authoritarian legislation is present in modern-day laws, contrasting with the newer and more progressive democratic ones.

The relationship between law types and transitional democracies is understood through the types of legal systems themselves. Scholars Nonet and Selznick (1978) posit the three types of legal systems that reflect society in how they evolve into the other: Repressive law, Autonomous law,

and Responsive law. Repressive law, acting through fear, aims to rule through oppressive measures which maintain the current authoritative power. This is done to suppress dissent through direct (legislative) and indirect censorship (a normalized culture of fear). In this type of legal system, investigative journalists may be more persecuted and unprotected in response to their work. Autonomous law works to have an independent legal system that functions outside of political power, as judicially independent, where it is equally applied to everyone. The idea is to strengthen the legal institutions to work through the next phase. Here, investigative journalists might have more protections and legal aid in the necessary instances. Responsive law functions through a more equitable platform, where the laws adapt to the needs of society—the desired stage for any aspiring democracy. This creates an atmosphere of open debate and encourages journalists and the public to hold officials accountable, without fear of retribution. The evolution between these types of legal systems mirrors its society; in the case of countries that transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic, the legal system may shift from repressive to autonomous law. Further consolidated, it may then shift again from autonomous to responsive. Investigative journalism, in full effect, may promote these changes through accountability measures, supporting a legal and political evolution into a democratic one.

The political track affects the journalist's job greatly, especially during the democratic transition, as Voltmer (2006) discusses in her work regarding *political parallelism*. Political parallelism, in which the media is influenced by a certain political party, can have a great effect on the state of media by legislative influences. When the media is closely aligned with political actors, the legislation for press regulation can be created with this in mind, allowing for unequal enforcement of those laws against media outlets that are often critical of the government. The political interest can extend to the judiciary as well, where cases against journalists can be judged unfairly. This is even more exemplified in transitional democracies, such as the Philippines, as the media ownership and structure and the legal powers indicate a top-down structure. This creates an environment for media to more likely align with powers within the regime (Voltmer 2013). Voltmer's theories closely align with Hallin and Mancini's *Polarized Pluralist Model*, which also links media and political parties, including heightened State involvement in media in transitional democracies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, where the two theories differ is in the geographical application, where Hallin and Mancini's model is restricted to the Western world and Voltmer's expands beyond. Additionally, the *Polarized Pluralist Model* focuses on the

comparison between different media frameworks while Voltmer expands upon the intricacies of media within transitional democracies in particular.

Philippines legal system

An example of the Philippines during a repressive legal system is the 1965-1986 Marcos presidency. While the political climate shifted after the 1986 People's Power Revolution, legislation was implemented to prevent instances like President Marcos' takeover, such as the 1987 Constitution, which states that "No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances." (Constitution of the Philippines, 1987, Art. III, Sec. 4). This aimed to create more safeguards for journalists, such as free speech and human rights protections. However, restrictive legislative action from President Marcos' martial law did not end with a change in leadership; in fact, new deterrent measures were introduced later such as in Aquino's administration forty years later (Robie & Abcede, 2015). The mindset set forth by the Marcos regime carried throughout post-administration, where loyalists successfully embedded themselves into powerful government positions (Jereza, 2020). This creates an interesting position between repressive and autonomous law in the Philippine legal system. This is unsurprising, though, given that a transitional democracy in different stages will shift in response to the previous regime. While the current administration attempts to distance itself from the last repressive legal system under Marcos (even as the current President is his son), it strives for an autonomous one so as not to backslide back into authoritarianism. As Nonet and Selznick state, "although a legal order will exhibit elements of all types, its basic posture may nevertheless approximate one type more closely than the others." (Nonet & Selznick, 1978, as cited in Feeley, 1979, p. 900).

Thus comes the matter of investigative reporting within a blend of a repressive and autonomous legal system, which proves to be especially challenging as the government has continuously pushed back against investigative journalists, even openly so. The cause of such unhelpful legislative measures is not always made straightforward by their perpetrators, as was the case when ABS-CBN, among the largest of the Philippine news broadcasters, was shut down (Tapsell, 2022). The news network was often critical of the then-President Duterte and received

obvious spiteful comments from him in return. Although ABS-CBN was legally allowed a congressional hearing on whether to renew the legislative franchise, it was not, leaving many to wonder whether the decision was made based on Duterte's bias, as the result was then reduced negative coverage of his administration.

The aspects of the Philippine legal system have not been all negative, however, as the autonomous side of the system has benefitted journalism. The Supreme Court, for example, decided to decriminalize libel for public criticism against public figures¹⁵, which allowed journalists to work with more freedom and less fear of prosecution, if not for false accusations, then for honest mistakes. Another act in which the legal system's autonomous nature shone was the *Adonis v. Republic of the Philippines* (2007)¹⁶, which brought the international spotlight on how detrimental defamation laws can be on journalists. This case concerned journalist Adonis, who was accused of criminal libel due to a report. The case was sent in a petition to the *United Nations Human Rights Committee* (UNHRC), hoping to showcase how human rights were being violated, and which they ultimately ruled in favor of. This set a standard for a reformation in the legal system and a successfully autonomous judiciary system, free from the governmental strings being pulled behind them.

Within a repressive, autonomous, responsive legal system (or a blend of any), investigative journalism demonstrates its effectiveness by producing three types of policy effects: *deliberative effect* (openly discussed problems) *individualistic* (sanctions against the individual), and *substantive* (leading to visible and direct changes in the law) (Coronel, 2010). Its ability to produce investigations into legislative bodies has been observed frequently over time and around the world (Waisbord, 2002). In the deliberative effects that it provides, investigative journalism can stimulate public discourse and debate, which can then prompt civic interest and participation. This engagement can fall under the realm of protests, which would then concentrate more pressure on the officials to take action. One example of this is the numerous journalist reports made on Duterte's War on Drugs, which shed a spotlight on the abuses taking place, increasing the regional and global pressure on the administration. The individualistic policy effects

¹⁵ Buan, L. (2021, June 29). Supreme Court acquits Raffy Tulfo of libel to "protect vigilant press." RAPPLER; Rappler. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/supreme-court-acquits-raffy-tulfo-libel/>

¹⁶ Supreme Court E-Library. (2019). G.R. No. 182855. Judiciary.gov.ph. <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/1/56053>

produced impact the subject of the matter and the readership base themselves, as the subject of the investigative report is punished and the awareness and behaviors of the news readers are changed. It could also empower the victim, depending on the story, through sharing their story. The substantive policy effects that can take place include an investigative reveal of systemic issues, which direct legislation addresses. These reports can lead to institutional changes through amending old laws or creating new ones.

The efficacy of media is evident in its contribution to the democratization of the Philippines (Gloria, 2000). One such example is the case of former Philippine President Estrada, in which investigative reports revealed his questionable wealth was to have been obtained through illegal methods (Coronel, 2008). This led to an eventual impeachment trial in 2000, as well as a series of other accusations against Estrada over the years. Notable investigations such as this have galvanized grassroots movements and pushed for reforms. The momentum that builds on the monitoring of authoritative figures and their administration pushes for a continuous watch on the overall structure of the system. By shedding light on systemic injustices and holding the powerful accountable, investigative journalism has not only bolstered democratic principles but also empowered citizen engagement in the political process. In this way, investigative journalism continues to be essential in advancing democratization efforts in the Philippines, serving as a watchdog for democracy and a catalyst for social transformation. An important note made by scholars like Sheila Coronel (2008) mentions that the overall impact that investigative reporting may have on the policy may be subjected to the external forces of the media, therefore it is important to take these factors into account when evaluating the relationship between journalism and governmental changes. Simply put, investigative journalism “requires the existence of legal, political, and economic conditions that guarantee minimal autonomy for news organizations and journalists” (Waisbord, 2002, p. 382).

Nostalgia for a Forgotten Past

Although present laws can impact the modern-day journalism workplace, history retains its influence on media laws regardless of political change. The effect of legislation on public thought is impactful, as it can create a succession of events triggered by the initial acceptance or rejection of the people. While many legislative measures are passed to guarantee rights, others

are meant to restrict. The purpose of legislation, though not always achieved, should be to improve the overall welfare of society. Scholars have studied ways to evaluate this, such as the *Kaldor-Hicks efficiency* method which examines the compensation benefits from economic policies (Hovenkamp, 1990). If applied to the concept of legal barriers to investigative journalism, one could say that the losses created in the process of an investigative report could be compensated by the overall benefits. This criterion is also criticized for its attempt to measure subjective utility, which is relevant to the policies that are not intended for yet still affect journalism. However, some relevant gains due to investigative journalism could be uncovering governmental malpractice, exposing the misuse of funds, or improving the country's regulatory framework through a reformation of systemic issues. However, these come with serious costs, such as the physical and mental well-being of journalists or the legal and financial battles for news organizations.

The legacy and historical trauma of authoritarian regimes can influence the contemporary culture of the general public's attitude toward the current administration. Jereza (2020) discusses the impact of "memory laws", or laws that impact the memory of historical events through legislation. After the Marcos regime ended in 1986, several laws were put into effect concerning the Marcos family's corruption, and human rights abuses they committed (Jereza, 2020). However, a 2016 report¹⁷ by PhilStar described how only 44% of respondents acknowledged the oppression during Marcos' dictatorship. Similarly, as a refusal of Marcos' image and actions, the Duterte administration argued whether former President Marcos should be buried in the Heroes' Cemetery. Ultimately, the Supreme Court allowed the burial under several points, including acknowledging Duterte's presidential power and finding no legal disqualification of the act. Due to cases such as *Ocampo v. Enriquez*, the public memory and opinion of Marcos shifted and interpreted in a more relaxed and forgiving nature, despite his authoritarian and anti-human rights behaviors during his rule (Jereza, 2020). The hope that time will erase or ease the memory of a dictator overruled the acknowledgment of its lasting impact on the country's political institutions. This affects the possibility of a change in public opinion, undermining the effort to repeal or amend repressive laws from the previous regimes and potentially slowing down the

¹⁷ Patricia Lourdes Viray, "Survey: 44% of Filipinos Agree There Was Oppression Under Marcos," *Philstar.com*, March 20, 2016. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/03/20/1564889/survey-44-filipinos-agree-there-was-oppression-under-marcos>.

process of enacting and normalizing beneficial media laws. Reflecting on the past and current restrictive measures, we can observe that ongoing efforts to maintain and progress press freedom are needed.

This chapter will discuss the legislative actions such as the passing of the FOI bill, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Defamation Act, and the Cybercrime Law. These major policy initiatives, while often proposed as progressive legislation for the country's democracy, have created new means by which journalists are unable to perform quality work. By identifying, analyzing, and understanding the impact of legislative barriers on investigative journalism in the Philippines, we can observe how these specific Filipino legislative measures fail to support the journalistic profession properly.

3.1. Information Access: FOI

One of the most effective forms of threat that the government can impose is the introduction and utilization of legislation in their favor, most especially the restriction of information access. Access to information for both journalists and the public is essential in a transitional democracy, as there needs to be a concerted effort of transparency by the government, often held accountable through the media (Ingrams, 2018; Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Multiple studies connect press freedom to information access (Ingram, 2018). An analytical study on information access (Ingrams, 2018) was conducted with 23 transitional countries, determining the factors that contribute to the decisions of countries that neglect or adopt these laws. This study concluded that the countries that failed to adopt productive information laws that foster transparency had weaker press freedoms. This lack of effective information laws can contribute to reduced transparency in governmental actions, impacting the democratic transition with poor information systems (Ingrams, 2018). Stiglitz (2002) notes that because there is an asymmetry in information access between those who hold the power of it and the public, it leads to societal inefficiencies. These inefficiencies in the sphere of journalism can include the lack of exposure of corruption and the governmental systemic issues, as well as the political relationship of the public: "Where political knowledge is low—for instance, because of low media freedom—the value of political participation is also low" (Leeson, 2008, p. 162). This is often used by politically powerful interests to spread through the media. The abuse of this informational hierarchy by journalists

against the public can lead to misinformation (incorrect information) or disinformation (intentionally incorrect information). Abusing legislative powers against the interests of journalists can also lead to perhaps no information at all, stifling the public's interest and participation in democratic discourse. This creates a suppressive environment where truth-telling is silenced, greatly impacting the public's decision-making due to poor or lack of information (Başlar, 2011). This suggests that journalists act as mediators of these power dynamics, where their power to bridge the information gap and the public's right to know is at peril when obstructed.

FOI

An essential legal support to journalists gathering information is the protection from a Freedom of Information law. The process of information requests would theoretically be handled outside of any governmental or partisan actor, allowing for a fairer handling of the power to information access (Žuffová, 2023). These laws are imperative in enforcing accountability from the government sector as well as supporting journalists in providing stories with proper, in-depth information. An FOI's principle rests on the "right to know" for the public, and although the FOI laws vary from country to country, the idea remains the same: anyone can request access to government records, and from there, the request may be fulfilled (fully or partially) or rejected. FOI laws are important in ensuring that journalists do not solely depend on government agencies for information, especially when investigative reports are concerning those agencies or related interests. Costa (2013) expands upon the importance of FOI laws, stating that an existing FOI law impacts a country's level and perception of corruption. Regarding these apparent FOI law effects, Ackerman & Sandoval-Ballesteros (2006) examine the global trend of a rise in implementation of FOI laws around the world, as well as the many challenges and opportunities it presents. Despite this trend, the Philippines' relationship with FOI remains complicated, as implementation and governmental support continues to prove challenging.

FOI in the Philippines

Despite the change in administration over the years, the Philippines still needs to implement a freedom of information law that covers all branches of the government. Perez (2020) notes that

in a Global Right to Information (RTI)¹⁸, the Philippines ranked 120th out of 123 countries in information access—a disappointing result. Efforts to introduce better information legislation, though they began in the 1980s in President Aquino’s administration, failed to advance. Instead, the Freedom of Information Act was implemented through Executive Order No.2 as a Presidential Order in 2016 by President Duterte. This Act was enacted with the intention of providing citizens with access to information, provided by the government. The demand for this legislation came from the public’s desire for transparency and reduction of corruption in the government, despite years of advocacy for such (Romero & Reyes, 2014). The Philippines also began one of the first electronic freedom of information portals (eFOI), adapting to the technological pathways of the time (Cabaero, 2016). The eFOI act mandated that executive agencies must respond to requests within 15 days or be faced with penalties (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2016). The popularity of the eFOI portal has increased throughout the years: the number of requests went up from 42,086 requests filed in 2019/2020¹⁹ to 73,834 requests in 2021/2022²⁰. Regardless of the apparent initiative for transparency, there remain several persistent issues in the employment and effects of this legislation.

Reduced Information Release

Despite the outward-facing benefit of the FOI Act, there remain several critics of information disclosure (Mendoza & Cruz, 2020; Salaverria, 2017). One example of this is the Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and NetWorth (SALN) of key administration officials, which are no longer automatically released by Malacañang Palace (Salaverria, 2017 as cited in Mendoza & Cruz, 2020). Information that was readily available *before* the implementation of the FOI Act was no longer available, indicating that steps were taken to prevent such open disclosure. Such factors can significantly slow down or fully stop the process of obtaining relevant information, yet there is no consequence for incidents such as these. Perez (2020) analyzed the reasons why the government rejected requests, categorizing it into 1) the government agency does not have the information, 2) Request is not FOI (where it is classified as other), 3) issues came from the user’s

¹⁸RTI - Rating The Institutions. (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2024, from <https://www.rti-rating.org/>

¹⁹ Philippines. (2020). Freedom of Information (FOI) Philippines annual report 2020. Presidential Communications Office. <https://mirror.pco.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-FOI-Philippines-Annual-Report.pdf>

²⁰ Philippines. (2022). Freedom of Information (FOI) Philippines annual report 2022. Presidential Communications Office. <https://www.foi.gov.ph/resources/publications/document/2022-foi-annual-report/>

side, 4) FOI exceptions (where the reasons for rejection fell under such reasons as national privacy issues, security reasons, etc). Many of these reasons, while valid, distinguish how the eFOI portal is not working as effectively as expected.

Power to Say No

Even if the information is readily available, there remains the decisive obstacle of requests being denied. The dilemma in power over FOI rests in the government controlling the processes in which information requests are handled, which gives the power of the platform intended for the public back into the hands of the government. Additionally, the government released a list of more than one hundred exceptions to the Act, creating further limitations to its effectiveness (Gavilan, 2016). Denying requests often comes with various “justifications” such as protection of privacy or matters of national security. The problem is when these reasonings are used inappropriately or excessively to deny information that could be used against high-profile actors.

Lack of Enforcement

The request-and-accept nature of the FOI can be limited by the government’s lack of execution, as there remain limited penalties for non-compliance or obstruction of information. Because the implementation of the law is fragmented, it leads to inconsistencies in which requests are accepted or denied. As a result, some requests may be disregarded or provide incomplete information without consequential action. While it is the role of the journalist to inform the public on issues that are otherwise not publicly accessible, their professional access to this information is all the more paramount. This access to information allows for more rounded and more frequent citizen participation as additional “watchdogs” of the government (Tandoc Jr., 2016). However, citizens are only able to make proper evaluations of the government when they are given access to the information. A lack of an effective FOI act can lead journalists to become more susceptible to misinformation and agenda-setting by their sources (Tandoc Jr., 2016). The rise of a fake news era, prominent in this digital age, makes the need for proper access of information even more urgent.

A Closed Court

A crucial part of any investigative journalist's job is keeping the powers in check, including cases involving or directly from the judiciary branch. To do so, journalists must access necessary records and proceedings to get the full story. The bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining this information lead to the questioning of this fine line between regulation and censorship. Ludwig (1954) discusses the relationship between the journalists covering legal proceeding, the public and their right to information, and the trial of the accused. The journalist gaining access to judicial information, whether it is through digital or physical court records or legal proceedings, must not be hampered by legal restrictions in doing so. Time-consuming measures such as efforts in obtaining court records because of a lack of a centralized database act as a deterrent to their work. In addition, a healthy legal system is necessary, as the power that judges carry over the courtroom can be misused if they are corrupt or influenced by political powers. In these judiciary instances, an effective information access law is even more paramount.

The overarching issue in court case access, however, remains in the protection of data privacy. Though the responsibility of investigative journalists is to keep the powerful accountable, to do so requires a certain access to essential records and proceedings. This remains a complex issue, as courts must implement consistent procedures that strike the proper balance between the public's right to informative news and protecting sensitive information. Cases such as those involving minors, sexual assault victims, or national security matters might be extra sensitive to share. While these limits exist, courts could provide clear reasons for rejection or offer redacted or anonymized transcripts to protect identities.

Philippine Judicial Access

The case of the Philippines regarding judicial access for journalists remains complicated, as prevailing limitations disrupt the flow of reporting. Tiongson (2015) analyzes these restrictions through the lens of limited "live" access to court proceedings, which contribute to a non-transparent judicial system. The author alludes to the possibility of maintaining proper privacy and integrity in the courtroom while enhancing transparency, proposing the idea of a program in which the media, judiciary, and legislature all collaborate to create a fair framework that can

offer this reality. While the Supreme Court E-Library in the Philippines offers journalists information on official decisions of the Supreme Court (Atienza, 2023), it only offers completed instead of ongoing processes, restricting the journalist to the reasonings made in real-time. This current system leans more towards restriction than adjusted access for journalists. Overall, the Philippines' approach to judicial access remains complicated, which disrupts the timely flow of information that journalists provide to the public.

3.2. A Test of Censorship: Anti-Terrorism Act

The difficulty in transitional democracies expands beyond just access limitations, it also imposes danger to journalists' reputation and credibility. The association between terrorism and political transition is difficult to undo: “Because of the linkage with information warfare and the transition from the bureaucratic state to the informational state (Braman, 2007), it is difficult to find an area of anti-terrorism laws and regulations that do not involve and affect communication” (Braman, 2011, p. 488). Information has long been used as a political weapon, driving up governmental suspicion of journalist endeavors and using it as justification for retaliation. The habit of mistaking journalistic investigation and expression for terrorism only proves that the media field's issues often hinge on the government's attitude behind them. In 2016, a special report was made on how journalists were being targeted by accusations of terrorism in Europe, interfering with their news reports (Costa-Kostritsky, 2016). Turkish journalist Sevgi Akarçesme, affected by anti-terror legislation, describes its effectiveness in the enactor's favor as “elusive” in the sense that it does not need substantial evidence to make a claim, leaving the door more open for abuse (Costa-Kostritsky, 2016). This can be exacerbated as well by non-legislative measures such as anti-press rhetoric and impunity of journalist violence, affecting the personal well-being of journalists and the quality of the profession.

Anti-Terrorism in the Philippines

The Philippines has experienced a significant political history of tumult, which had an impact on the formation of many terrorist organizations and attacks across the country that led to great economic loss (Mears, 2017). The major perpetrators of these attacks are the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) and the Mindanao secessionist groups, which

have created tensions within the Philippine political climate. Data shows the number of terrorist attacks in the Philippines has increased overall from 2004-2016, as well as the different levels of terrorism changing (Mendoza et.al, 2021). The trajectory of terrorist acts has unquestionably had a major impact on the types of legislation implemented in the country.

To mitigate these incidents, Philippine administrations have attempted to regain control through counterterrorism legislative measures such as the Human Security Act of 2007 (HSA). The HSA Act, which aimed to identify and outline the consequences of terrorism, was highly critiqued for its vague language and the fact that it was only utilized a few times, despite being the primary law against terrorism in the country (Mendoza et.al, 2021). Several groups filed a Supreme Court petition in an attempt to deem it unconstitutional, under the reasoning of the law's actions of "legitimization for the Philippine government to continue violating constitutionally protected individual rights" (Lyew, 2010, p. 193), though it was ultimately denied. The problem for individual journalists arose more frequently when the application of terrorist definitions began to be directed toward them due to improper interpretations of the law.

While presented as a defence act in favor of the public, the Philippine government enacted the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) in 2020, which expands the definition and consequences of potential terrorists, to replace the 2007 HSA. Although the law is seemingly an attempt to prevent the growth and risks of terrorist groups, it poses a significant amount of threat against journalists. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) opposed the Act with a statement describing the danger of the act's broad definition of terrorism, endangering journalists who are accused by those who feel threatened by their reporting (Puente, 2020). The Anti-Terrorism Council is given the power to accuse anyone they deem as suspicious to be a terrorist, creating an intense concentration of power in their hands. This power is greatly unchecked, since if the suspicions turn out to be incorrect, the law enforcement agencies have no liabilities (Mendoza et.al, 2021). This creates a culture of fear for not only the reporters themselves but the sources who often expand or initiate the story, such as whistleblowers, who act as important agents of investigation. Sources may be fearful of revealing sensitive information if their identity might be exposed and the consequences would be unpredictable. The National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL) even requested the Supreme Court to overturn the law due to it effectively criminalizing intent (McCarthy, 2020). The problem with ATA is that the law essentially worked on the

“presumption that the current institutions—the whole gamut of the security, executive, and judicial institutions—would give high regard to human rights and would exercise a robust degree of accountability” (Mendoza et.al, 2021, p. 56). The legal institutions of the Philippines, however, have proved to be relatively weak during its time in democratic transition, affecting the state and the use of the law.

A prominent example of the questionable application of ATA is the case of journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio, who was arrested in the Philippines in 2020. CPJ reported that after frequently covering abuse in police and military contexts, she was arrested on charges of illegal firearm possession and terrorism financing²¹. The official reason for the arrest was “facilitating the distribution of funds and other logistical supplies, such as ammunitions, to the Communist Party of the Philippines and its New People’s Army armed wing” (CPJ, para.7, n.d.). This blatant lie of “facilitation” was used as a justification for her arrest, still holding her in prison as of 2024. If she is convicted based on the Anti-Terrorism Act, she could face a maximum of 40 years in prison time. The consequences for implications of the Act are stated under Section 8, which declares that punishment is available for anyone who:

(i) deals directly or indirectly, in any way and by any means, with any property or fund that he knows or has reasonable ground to believe is owned or controlled by a designated person, organization, association or group of persons, including funds derived or generated from property or funds owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by a designated person, organization, association or group of persons; or

(ii) makes available any property or funds, or financial services or other related services to a designated and/or identified person, organization, association, or group of persons, shall suffer the penalty of reclusion temporal in its maximum period to reclusion perpetua and a fine of not less than Five hundred thousand pesos (Php500,000.00) nor more than One million pesos (Php1,000,000.00).²²

The effect of Cumpio being charged on “reasonable ground to believe” that she possessed firearms and was involved in terrorism financing enables a wider range of unreliable supposed “justifications” as well as narrows the need for proof of such suspicions. “Reasonable ground to believe”, for example, is significantly less stringent than “beyond a reasonable doubt”, allowing

²¹ CPJ. (n.d.). Frenchie Mae Cumpio. Committee to Protect Journalists. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from <https://cpj.org/data/people/frenchie-mae-cumpio/>

²²G.R. No. 168338. (n.d.). Lawphil.net. https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2008/feb2008/gr_168338_2008.html

for less strict measures of proof to instigate legal action. Examples such as Cumpio's prove how difficult it is to contest laws that are vaguely defined and aid in possibly suppressing critical journalistic voices. Investigative journalists who work on beats such as corruption and human rights issues are more susceptible to facing charges like Cumpio, foiled by the Anti-Terrorism Act. This is dangerous as it sets a precedent for the misuse of vague definitions.

3.3. Defamation: Revised Penal Code

Laws that are not specifically directed at journalists can impact their work all the same, as can be seen through defamation laws. Defamation laws in general are often regarded as too restrictive and influential on journalistic quality and the journalists themselves (Kenyan & Marjoribanks, 2008). The ambiguous nature of these laws can lead to subjective and capricious enforcement. As investigative journalists, their mission is to serve the public interest, regardless of the reputational consequences of their subject. However, in said attempts to save their reputation, government and elite actors could utilize defamation laws in their power to protect their interests and interfere with the journalistic process. The subjective utilization of such laws leaves room for an array of misuse, leading to a loss in the journalist's time, credibility, and a potentially impactful news story. In addition, defending themselves against defamation laws can be costly in legal fees for the journalist or their organization. These overall burdens, if not already acts of censorship, can encourage self-censorship from journalists, as the legal issues can add to a journalist's psychological pressure.

Defamation in the Philippines

Defamation laws in the Philippines, particularly those concerning criminal libel, have long been a tool used by the powerful to suppress journalists. Scholar Melanie Pinlac (Pinlac, 2012, para.1) states: "Criminal libel is one of the most abused means to suppress free expression and press freedom in the Philippines." The struggle to decriminalize libel in the Philippines has been present for years past, from requests for libel provision amendments to the declaration made by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) that criminal libel is a human rights violation (Robie & Abcede, 2015). Such is the case with the current Articles 353, 355, and 358 of the Revised Penal Code (Vicencio, 2019). Article 353 defines libel as

public and malicious imputation of a crime, or of a vice or defect, real or imaginary, or any act, omission, condition, status, or circumstance tending to cause the dishonor, discredit, or contempt of a natural or juridical person, or to blacken the memory of one who is dead.²³

Since the determination of what actually constitutes “libel” is wildly subjective, this Article can be used to protect interests from investigative journalists. This is a common aspect of laws with “negotiable phrases”, often implemented during transitional democracies, which acts as a coercive strategy veiled behind legislation to silence critics (Faris et.al, 2023). They are negotiable due to the selective enforcement and interpretation of the language based on the needs of who is doing so. Such vague language can lead to severe consequences for journalists who are accused.

Legal and Financial Consequences

The Revised Penal Code poses significant consequences for investigative journalists through its attempt to define and specify the act and its consequences. Article 355 states that

A libel committed by means of writing, printing, lithography, engraving, radio, phonograph, painting, theatrical exhibition, cinematographic exhibition, or any similar means, shall be punished by prison correccional in its minimum and medium periods or a fine ranging from [+1,200-6,000], or both, in addition to the civil action which may be brought by the offended party.²⁴

The consequences for libel, in the case of journalists being wrongly accused, are especially daunting. Because the written forms mentioned cover most journalism types, they act as a more probable tool to use against journalism if the occasion arises. To specify the repercussions of slander, Article 358 determines that

Oral defamation shall be punished by arresto mayor in its maximum period to prison correccional in its minimum period if it is of a serious and insulting nature; otherwise the penalty shall be arresto menor or a fine not exceeding [+1200].

²³ An Act Revising the Penal Code and Other Penal Laws [REVISED PENAL CODE], Act No. 3815, arts. 353, 355, & 358 (1930).

²⁴ An Act Revising the Penal Code and Other Penal Laws [REVISED PENAL CODE], Act No. 3815, arts. 353, 355, & 358 (1930).

Journalists must tread carefully in interviews, spoken reports, or other public speaking activities. This diminishes the possibility of an in-depth report and an open discussion with the public. As a result, the resources for journalism outlets are diverted in an attempt to deal with the consequences of arrest, libel suits, or harassment.

Proposed justifications for accusations

To legitimize the consequences of libel and slander accusations against journalists, justifications that can be used by the state relates the issue to matters of national security or values (Faris et.al, 2023). This is a very effective excuse in the name of patriotism, in which it is hard to argue with the subjectivity of the offense. Similarly, in the Revised Penal Codes, Article 138 discusses the crime of incitement to rebellion through methods of “speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners or other representations tending to the same end” (Republic of the Philippines, 1930, p. 39). This poses a significant problem for investigative journalists, as their reports inform and can increase natural public engagement, but it is not a guaranteed intention to do so. The attempts to give grounds to these accusations, while promoted as a means to protect social and economic stability, often prove the lack of due process within the legislative system. The means of libel under the Revised Penal Codes covered written and spoken mediums, but with the growing technological landscape influencing journalism, it soon extended to cyberspace as well.

3.4. Online Freedom of Expression: Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012

Freedom of expression in the digital age, while adding value to public discourse and information dissemination, is challenging both in regulation and implementation. In the context of investigative journalism, the online sphere amplifies the reach and impact of critical reporting but also exposes journalists to new forms of censorship, surveillance, and harassment. One facet of this is cybercrime, or the “crimes that take place within that space and the term has come to symbolize insecurity and risk online” (Wall, 2007, p. 10). This could take the form of hacking, data theft, or online harassment. With the latter, the developed digital age allows content to spread quickly, blurring the lines for the average audience between fact and misinformation. The impact of cybercrime on journalists is severe, as it can undermine their credibility, endanger their

confidentiality, and create much financial and psychological stress on the outlets. Woolley (2020) notes how cyber threats are increasingly being used to manipulate information, thus affecting public opinion, elections, and other imperative facets of democracy.

Freedom of Expression in the Philippines

While freedom of expression for the media was especially endangered during the martial law of President Marcos, opportunities arose for further expression through alternate outlets online. Internet accessibility and social media provided new avenues for news distribution for independent outlets as well. However, there is the worry that increased technological access today can lead to a rise in indirect surveillance and censorship.

One law that received a significant amount of uproar in the Philippines is the *Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012*, apparent in its branding as the “e-martial law” which likened it to Marcos’ *Proclamation 1081*, the formal proclamation in 1972 that aimed to silence news media and civil groups (Robie & Abcede, 2015). This Act serves as an extension of the previously stated instances of libel within the Revised Penal Code to cybercrime cases. Cybercrime is widely defined as “a crime committed with or through the use of information and communication technologies such as radio, television, cellular phone, computer and network, and other communication device or application” (DOJ, 2012, p. 12, as cited in Heffron, 2014, p. 97). While advocates of the act claim that it would protect the public from harmful internet users, the consequences for online libel could also have a significant impact and greater risk to journalistic reporting. In the Philippines, the word “cybercrime” currently does not have a concrete definition under the law (Heffron, 2014). This vague nature of the word offers further difficulty in its subjective interpretation. As a 2008 petition against the law states: “A law is facially invalid if men of common intelligence must necessarily guess at its meaning and differ as to its application” (Sps. Carlos S. Romualdez and Erlinda R. Romualdez vs. Commission On Elections And Dennis Garay, 2008, p. 12 as cited in Heffron, 2014). Melanie Pinlac of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CFMR) stated that

Most local news organisations repost what ha[s] been printed in the papers on their websites or blog, so they would all be susceptible. This is in addition to the possibility of

facing civil defamation charges. In the Philippines, a person can be sued separately and independently under both its penal and civil codes. (Pinlac, 2012, p. 2)

This common function of reposting in news practice, especially in the digital news sphere, poses defamation threats to journalists. Moreover, the effect of this law is not solely on reporting but subsequently on the “shaping of public opinion” (Robie & Abcede, 2015). Given journalism’s impact on molding public thought through the distribution of facts and encouraging critical thinking, the public’s response toward desired government accountability may not reach its full effect if they are not given full context for analysis.

A pertinent example of this Act’s impact is the case of Maria Ressa, in which she and Rappler were charged with cyber libel, regarding a news article about a wealthy businessman and his alleged interests, published before the law was even enacted (Go, 2019). The employment of this law concerning Ressa’s case allowed Ressa and a fellow researcher to face the repercussions of prison time and a fine. This case illustrated that even a renowned news outlet such as Rappler could feel the impacts of legislative abuse by the government, as the concern for more subtle approaches in stifling journalism is less apparent, which proves the government’s confidence in its power.

Abuse of the Law & Undermining Legitimacy

A sturdy legal framework is necessary for media systems to survive. If the law is enforced arbitrarily, it can weaken its credibility and unbiased foundation. Roberts (2008) contemplates the role of legislation from the perspective of legality vs. legitimacy, where the distinction is made between legality, or conformity with the law, and legitimacy, where actors conform with the ethical standards. This is apparent in the Philippine legislation discussed earlier, where their legality interferes with the ethical obligations in the journalism sphere to inform the public properly. While the abuse can take many forms, from corruption and manipulation to selective enforcement of the law, the consequences are the same. The public loses its trust in the system if it sees that it benefits not the common people but mainly the elites. Additionally, the idea that justice can be achieved through legal means begins to fade, perhaps leading to social unrest. To evade such outcomes, officials can take this effort to balance legal with ethical considerations when implementing new legislative measures. To do so, judiciary committees can take into

account how the laws affect human rights while being practical in their employment, all while maintaining transparency throughout the judiciary process.

Major Filipino Investigations

Throughout the Philippines' time as a democracy, several investigative pieces have shifted the course of political action, but at a cost. The barriers those journalists faced illustrated just how closely the ties are between investigative journalism and political players, with the politicians at an advantage.

One prominent example of a consequential investigative report is the *Hello Garci* Scandal in 2005. In 2004, Former President Arroyo was accused of rigging the presidential election through released tapes of her discussion with the Elections Commissioner (Hutchcroft, 2008). The exposure results included a decrease in public trust in the government, allowing the public to see just how short the Philippines fell from being a fully transitioned democracy. This was due not only to the corruption in the government but, when unveiled, the government's handling of its criticism through protests and calls for Arroyo's resignation. Often, the legislative tools are weaponized to not only suppress critical reporting but also silence dissent; however, in this case, it only galvanized the public's anger at its misuse even more. This incident highlights Roberts' (2008) point that the ethical considerations of the journalists to expose corruption were greater than the potential legal repercussions.

This released report, though without any legal consequence for Arroyo, created a significant change in the public mindset and future studies on the coverage of the incident. The relationship between the journalist and their audience was examined through this case when Ladrido (2007) conducted an analysis regarding the frames that were employed by news outlets during the scandal, finding that the *conflict frame* was used most often. This type of frame presents opposing sides and conflicts of the subject they write about. It is usually supported by more dramatic language to enhance the intensity and allow the audience to see which side they can choose (de Vreese, 2005; Schuck, 2016). The issue with this framing is that its focus on polarities can create an overly simplistic interpretation of the event, rather than amplify the systemic problems of corruption in the government—a tactic served to garner the audience interest. Nevertheless, the report effectively mobilized the Filipino public by demonstrating that

even the highest level of power is not exempt from accountability. An alternate valuable result from this scandal was the 2008 *Chavez v. Gonzales* case²⁵, in which the Supreme Court ruled against the government and for the freedom of expression of the press that exposed the *Hello Garci* scandal. This case reinforced the press freedoms protected under the Constitution and emphasized how crucial a watchdog media is to the government (Artiaga, 2021).

Another significant investigative report was the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) informally known as the Pork Barrel Scam in 2013, a report released by outlets such as the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that exposed the inappropriate handling of public funds by several lawmakers. The premise of the scam was that lawmakers endorsed fake NGOs in which the funds would return to the pockets of the conspirators. This report moved the public to acts of protest and an investigation into the actors involved, including several senators. The impacts of this investigative report not only uncovered the actions of the direct participants but also of the systematic corruption in the Philippine government, revealing that the actions of political actors were serving their interests, not the public's.

These Philippine cases have shown that investigative reports not only influence legislative behavior but have proven to create a strong amount of public reaction as well, bringing attention and readership to the news organizations. This could serve as an advantage for financial investment matters for the news outlets in need of alternate sources of funding. How the journalists handled themselves in the face of threat proved to be professional and skillful, but not all have the opportunity to do so. This is where external support is especially necessary in protecting journalists.

3.5. Regional and Global Responses to Press Freedom

Despite these drawbacks to the profession, there has been ongoing national and international support for the Philippines' plight. International media organizations such as the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ), the *International Center for Journalists* (ICFJ), *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF), and *Global Media Freedom Coalition* (GMFC) acted in support of Filipino journalists and against the developing governmental restrictions (Kahn, 2022). A result from

²⁵ G.R. No. 168338. (2008). Lawphil.net. https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2008/feb2008/gr_168338_2008.html

Kahn's (2022) study showed that the journalists who were interviewed believed that Filipino press freedom is influenced by the journalists' international and audience support. By spreading global awareness, more perspectives and pressure are put on high-profile actors to demand and make changes in the media sector.

The varied international oppositional efforts to Philippine legislation portray how international norms can contrast with domestic law. Scholars have noted that public opinion towards domestic courts is largely dependent on factors such as high regard for constitutions and laws, ideology, and perceived legitimacy, though there remains debate on which factors have a true impact on domestic law decisions (Simmons, 2017). The Philippines Supreme Court's attitude seems to be that it "oscillates between an embrace of international law and a global outlook, and a more protectionist, insular judicial attitude that would readily eschew international norms" (Llamzon, 2002, p. 248). Even so, it appears that the Philippines does take the internalization of international law into serious consideration (Llamzon, 2002). This might be explained by the fact that typically, smaller powers seek to support international laws and institutions in an attempt to gain favor in their foreign policy decision-making (Magcamit, 2020).

The attitude towards international norms could ultimately affect domestic decision-making if international pressure continued to mount. This, of course, is dependent on the leader in power. Duterte, for example, faced extreme international criticism over his anti-press actions through rhetoric, impunity, and other means during his presidency. However, he often rebuffed international norms and committees such as the *United Nations* (UN), the *International Criminal Court* (ICC), and the *Human Rights Watch* (HRW), eager to assert his power and distance the Philippines from most especially the US and the European Union (Magcamit, 2020).

Noncooperation between domestic and international powers can create tension and inconsistency in legislative creation and implementation, as is the case for the Philippines. Journalists in countries that are not exactly stable may accept media assistance, however; then comes the issue of abandoning the goal of an independent media that is free from governmental or political control. It is true, though, that media is never totally free from government control, not even in consolidated democratic societies (Lamat, 2007). Khan (2022) concluded through interviews with Filipino journalists that local media outlets are ultimately grateful for international support for press freedom, however, because global media coalitions and support groups can be selective,

local media outlets may not always feel their impact. Even so, collective support may influence their perception of their press freedoms and their outlook on the future of journalism.

The press-supportive groups in the Philippines, amongst journalism outlets facing multiple press violations, have themselves not remained silent. To prevent and remedy the consequences of unjust legislative infringements on journalist's rights, many media advocacy groups were formed, including the *National Union of Journalists of the Philippines* (NUJP), *Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility* (CMFR), and the *Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism* (PCIJ). These organizations not only defend the current journalist struggles but also advocate for broader reform in internal and external influences on journalism.

Heightened Vulnerability for Independent Media Outlets

Even with the external support of coalitions and alliance organizations, there remain various economic struggles while outlets navigate their way through the landmine of legislative deterrents. Independent media outlets are all the more vulnerable in these situations. Large outlets rely on their financial means and pocket-full investors to provide legal support such as lawyers, bailouts, etc. during episodes of legal accusation, while smaller organizations must find these means that are not readily or easily available (Faustino, 2022). Their visibility could be stronger than established legacy outlets, therefore alternate means of funding may not as easily be found. This lack of visibility and limited resources may impact their reputation and credibility as well.

Høiby (2019) interviewed Filipino journalists, comparing the local journalists with Manila reporters, who claimed that the Manila reporters have better access to more effective sources, resources, and salaries due to them coming from bigger companies. Independent journalists or media organizations often encounter legal challenges such as those presented above, threats of arrest, and substantial fines that can either slow down their work or halt it altogether. This precarious environment is dangerous for the independence of its media sector, as challenges such as these threaten the robustness of diverse journalism. The Philippines, however, is not the only transitionally democratic country to face these pertinent issues.

3.6. Comparison to Other Transitioning Democracies

In comparison to other transitioning countries, the Philippines faces a majority of common issues as other governments in transition. Through a systematic review, the countries most frequently analyzed from 43 papers were from Eastern Europe and Asia, with the least being from the Middle East. Most of the countries analyzed demonstrated more external issues with their press freedom rather than internal.

The similarities in the struggle between transitioning democratic countries preview an overall trend for press freedom. While these countries mostly have press freedom guaranteed within their constitution, like the Philippines, the enforcement of these protections is uncertain. For example, Egypt and Iraq, transitional governments from previous authoritarian regimes, suffer the main threats to press freedom of state interventional and legal and policy-structure control, in which the majority of the flow of information is controlled by the government (Fontaine, 2024, unpublished systematic review). Regarding internal issues, the problems of self-censorship and independence are often created or influenced by external factors. Within these transitional countries, these factors create the same issue as for the Philippines: transcending past the transitional phase to the consolidated one. Due to the external causes, internal issues develop within the profession and paradoxically feed into the external.

Countries with varying legislative environments for investigative journalism in comparison to the Philippines can offer valuable insights. In nations with more democratic progress, such as Norway, Switzerland, and Finland, strong legal protections for press freedom and supportive press rhetoric enable journalists to investigate and report without fear of retribution or self-censorship (Guseva et.al, 2008). Conversely, in more restrictive political environments such as the examples we will discuss next, it bleeds into the media sphere with laws and government control that limit journalistic freedom.

Philippines in comparison with neighboring countries

These legislative barriers to press freedom in the Philippines reflect a broader trend of the employment of legal frameworks to restrict independent journalism. Although many countries in Southeast Asia are non-democratic, enduring heavy military influence and monopolizing

political control, they often present similar obstructive measures to journalism as the Philippines. Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar, some of the most influential countries of Southeast Asia, also utilize tough legislation to limit media freedoms, ranging from *lèse-majesté* and anti-sedition laws to broad anti-terrorism measures (Sujatnika, 2020). These types of legislative measures undoubtedly create a society in which the truth is not protected, regardless of the type of administration that governs. Despite this, while investigative journalists are limited in protections and resources, they have still pushed through to release effective reports in environments that are far less democratic than the Philippines.

Thailand

Thailand, now a constitutional monarchy, has faced numerous political turmoil and military interventions over the years, subscribing to a repressive legal system that operates in favor of those in power instead of the public. The political atmosphere gives investigative reporters ripe subjects for investigative reports of corruption and other abuses of power but are faced with barriers often by the very people they aim to expose.

The issue of indirect control through legislation, as seen with the ability to oppose or reject information requests in the Philippines, is also prominent in Thailand. For legislation to come into full effect, the Senate must ultimately approve the legislation, whose members are often appointed by the military. This gives the military access and power to legislative measures that can be determined in their favor. In addition to this large obstacle, Thailand faces the chilling reality of unforgivable defamation laws, with high-stakes consequences of imprisonment (Streckfuss, 2011). Amongst these, a set of defamation laws named *lèse-majesté* within Section 112 of the Thai Penal Code completely prohibit criticism of the monarchy, with a punishment of imprisonment. This openly repressive legal system is a reflection of their society's fearful and unhealthy relationship with the government.

Despite these interferences, Thai investigative journalists persist, as is seen by the strong impactful example when Thailand's journalists exposed its Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra for corruption and abuse of power (Sujatnika, 2020). Although the journalists involved faced harassment and threats related to the Prime Minister, large protests and a coup eventually ousted

him from power instigated by the journalistic unveiling. The demonstration of public participation reinforces the invigoration that investigative reports produce.

Vietnam

Vietnam presents itself as a Socialist country, with controlled elections and limited opposition. This political nature is reflected in their news media system as well, with many outlets being state-controlled and a significant amount of obstructive media legislation (Nguyen-Thu, 2018). This is particularly demonstrated in Vietnam's *Cybersecurity Law* in 2018, which mirrors the Philippines' *Cybercrime Prevention Act*, as it imposes strict controls over online content, silencing criticism or dissent and justifying their actions in the name of national security (Nguyen-Thu, 2018). This gives the government more leeway in justifications, as those who oppose could be accused of sounding unloyal to their country. Unlike the Philippines' legislation which does so in a more subtle manner, the *Vietnam 2016 Press Law* explicitly points out the state's control over all media, ensuring that all investigating reporting aligns with their interests. This audacity to not even attempt to hide behind veiled language in their legislation is perhaps indicative of the immunity that the government perceives it possesses. Due to this extreme government surveillance on both online and print media, the Vietnamese government can impose legal and extra-legal consequences more easily on investigative journalists all while encouraging self-censorship.

Myanmar

As with other Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar's news media reflects the complexity of its political history. With high military intervention, the country retains its struggles in human rights issues and press freedom. The multitude of state-owned news media outlets is indicative of the power the government still holds (Burrett, 2017). In 2014, the government passed the *Media Act*, which gave the government power to accept or reject news publication licenses (Burrett, 2017). This is unlike the Philippines, which holds no requirement for media to request licenses or registration, and trampled hopes of a more autonomous media that is free from governmental powers. This law, in addition to the 2014 *Printers and Publishers Regulation Act*, created many restrictions on publications, such as the ban against publications that would 'violate the

constitution' or 'incite unrest', giving more power to the Ministry of Information (Crispin, 2014 as cited in Burrett, 2017, p. 51).

Like the other Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar's defamation laws are dangerous in their ambiguous language and consequences of imprisonment of two years (Aung, 2021). In 2014, the news outlets *Myanmar Herald* and *Daily Eleven* revealed the Ministry of Information's misuse of funds, leading to defamation charges against both outlets (Burrett, 2017). This undoubtedly created a more tense atmosphere for these outlets around censorship. Justifications such as inciting unrest may be used, interrupting the flow of information through an investigative report. Inciting unrest may be a worry for Myanmar journalists not only because of the defamation law backlash against them but also because of the worry that their readers will divide and retaliate against them as well. Burrett (2017) notes through journalist interviews that Myanmar journalists essentially self-censored after worrying that giving prominence to stories about inter-ethnic conflict might deepen the divide, the blame resting on the outlet. This perpetuates the anti-critical culture of journalism in societies with authoritarian traits and illustrates how such components advantage authoritarian rule and disadvantages democratic societies.

The similarities between the democratic Philippines and its neighbors should prompt contemplation on the need for change. Even with different governments, the three countries share the overarching problems facing investigative journalists of vaguely worded laws and a need for proper recourse when their profession is threatened. The need for collaborative reporting and regional and international journalism support is even more crucial in governments that work to limit their work. For the Philippines, these legislations highlight the need to join policy with internal professionalization: proper internal journalism practices can only be implemented and followed by enhancing legal protections for journalists and providing access to information through legislative measures. Allegedly supportive efforts, such as that of the Freedom of Information Act, can act restrictive in certain contexts when approached unethically or improperly. Restrictive legislative measures as such contribute towards a democracy that does not progress past its stagnant status. While the legal issues in the Philippines are severe, the country's relatively active civil society and coalitions in favor of the media contrast with more authoritarian contexts where pushback is more challenging to sustain. Nevertheless, like

Thailand and Indonesia, the Philippines has had many investigative reports on corruption that led to effective policy changes.

The non-legislative and legislative barriers to investigative journalists serve as unfair obstacles to the informer and informant alike. The intricacies of such actions, beyond blatant acts such as violence, must be critically analyzed and connected to relevant actors so that proper recourse can be taken. Regardless of the intention of the current administration, whether to gain legitimacy, protect their interests, or other, the institutional stability within the country's political status must be stable for journalist protections to be implemented. The Philippines demonstrates, through various barriers, how investigative journalism shapes its democratic status, and vice versa. We will observe, through analyzed interviews with Filipino journalists, how those barriers have impacted their work in journalism and influenced the communication cycle that is necessary for a functioning democratic society.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design Overview

The research design for this study is rooted in qualitative methodology, which will focus on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. The method is suitable for the topic given that it is parallel to the journalism profession, which often employs thematic analyses from interviews as well. It was chosen due to its flexible nature and potential for in-depth responses, allowing a comprehensive insight into the interviewees' perspectives. The application of critical theory and thematic analysis to the interviews was used to reveal insights from the given data.

Method Justification

The approach of a qualitative method differs from a quantitative one in the sense that: "...because the fuller responses obtained by the qualitative study cannot be easily categorized, their analysis will rely less on counting and correlating and more on interpretation, summary, and integration" (Weiss, 1994, p. 3). The interpretation and categorization of themes allow for a broader perspective on emerging issues.

The chosen method of semi-structured interviews applies to the study through its emancipative objective of highlighting the barriers and the pathways toward societal change. With this goal in mind, discovering prominent themes within investigative journalism barriers will help determine the probable and best solutions to the problem.

Critique of the Qualitative Method

There remains a certain attitude to reject this qualitative method since qualitative interviews do not often provide quantitative statistics and are often dismissed by economists and other statistics-seeking scholars (Weiss, 1994). The prospect of such subjectivity intimidates the overall desire for irrefutable data. Wimpenny & Gas (2000) warn that interviews may not be the best fit for theory, even if it is the most popular one chosen. However, it must be taken into account that semi-structured interviews, for example, allow for a greater influx of qualitative data to then be extracted and analyzed. The semi-structured format allows for a more exploratory

nature to be introduced, imploring the subject to incorporate their experience into the data and thus providing contextual depth. This is appropriate to the topic of discussion given that specific insights into the news media field in the Philippines can allow for a broader discussion and understanding of transitional democracies in the scope of the discussion.

What is Critical theory?

The choice for employing critical theory to qualitative research is important in adding to its depth and revealing larger, structural issues. Critical theory, in this case, is useful in the analysis of governmental barriers to investigative journalism in a transitional democracy as Macdonald (2017) stresses the importance of critical theory's ability to critically analyze political systems. Morrow (1994) explains how the interdisciplinary nature of critical theory allows for insight into complex social issues from various fields. The author emphasizes that one of the theory's strongest points is the interconnection between theory and practice, in that critical theory aims to address the issue and subsequently transform the practices.

The emphasis on critical theory is important to the relationship between power and social status, as the hierarchy of power within the government and the media often informs the quality of the journalistic profession. Just as critical thinking is essential to in-depth journalism, it is pivotal in analyzing data, too. The interrogation of data sources, the identification of biases, and discovery of underlying patterns are all facilitated by the tool that critical theory can be if properly used. The outcomes can permit journalists to interrogate unconscious beliefs that mediate their interpretation of events and their subsequent reporting. Adopting critical theory allows for the fostering of a critically reflective culture, in which narratives can be equitably challenged.

Critical Theory's Methodological Fit

The semi-structured interview format works well with the use of critical theory, through both of their in-depth analytical approach to social and political happenings. This format allows the interviewees to expand, if they wish, on their experiences working within the investigative journalism sector. This allows for more data to be collected and analyzed using critical theory.

Critique of Critical theory

The issue with critical theory is that the core concepts that it tries to analyze are themselves very complex, creating difficulty in measuring their impact in qualitative research. Scholar Benhabib (1986) discusses the difficulty in balancing the theoretical with concrete realities. This is even more acute within a transitional democracy, in which concepts such as power oppression are shifting during a democratic transition. The author emphasizes that historical context is important to take into consideration when applying critical theory, as the concepts analyzed fluctuate with time.

4.2. Participant Selection and Characterization

Participants for the semi-structured interviews were selected through purposive sampling, to ensure that their experience aligned with the main subject of the research. Several criteria were factored into the decision-making:

1. The journalists previously conducted investigative work for a Filipino news outlet for more than two years. This way, it was sure that they experienced, first-hand, the process and potential barriers that are associated with the work and are relatively familiar with the media landscape.

2. The majority of the participants worked in different news outlets. This criterion allowed for more diversity in perspective amongst individuals in different media organizations, which also allowed them to provide observed experiences of their colleagues in their newsrooms.

After researching various news organizations in the Philippines, the participants were contacted either through email or LinkedIn with a total of 29 journalists contacted. Of these contacted, 5 journalists responded and agreed to an interview. The profiles of the participants are displayed here in Table 1.

Table 1: *Participant Demographic Summary*

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Identified Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age Range	50-60	18-25	18-25	30-40	50-60
Current Role	Researcher; Writer	Correspondent; Writer	News Editor	News Editor	Associate News Editor
Current Organization	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism	Philippine Daily Inquirer	ABS-CBN	Rappler	Bulatlat; East Asia Forum; Pinoy Daily
Years in Position	>10	2-5	2-5	>10	>10
Date Interviewed (day/month/year)	02/07/2024	04/07/2024	04/07/2024	17/07/2024	23/07/2024

Informed Consent

Before the interview began, the participants were requested to allow the recording of the video interview for transcription purposes, ensuring that their names would be omitted from the final report to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The participants were informed through the initial invitation of the objective of the study and the purposes for the interview, with a mention that the results of the interview would be used in the methodological portion of this paper. Fink (2019) discusses the ethical obligation of the researcher to obtain informed consent from their participants. Following this ethical standard ensured that the participants provide voluntary and truthful answers but are also comfortable in expanding upon their experiences.

4.3. Data Collection

This study utilized the qualitative research method, employing a series of five semi-structured interviews with five journalists from the Philippines. The semi-structured interview format provided a flexible yet focused approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the impact of governmental barriers they faced on their investigative stories and the impact it had on the Philippines society. Open-ended questions enabled participants to express their insights and diverse perspectives for more intricate and elaborate data for analysis. The interviews were conducted through video on Zoom due to all the participants living in the Philippines and the inability to meet in person. Each call followed their time zone (5 participants in Manila time/PST ((Philippine Standard Time))), lasting for about 45 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English with both the interviewer and the participant's camera on. The video calls allowed the interview to feel more personal than through just audio and the participant's body language can be read. In this way, it adds another contextual layer to their words (Sullivan, 2012). However, although video calls are convenient in conducting interviews, there are some disadvantages as well. For example, there may be issues with the audio or video quality of the call, as presented a few times during the interviews. Throughout the 45 minutes for each call, I attempted as an interviewer to remain attentive to the participants while not interrupting them, often nodding at their responses. I tried not to manipulate their answers by letting them speak, but if I found they needed extra prompting to elaborate on their answers, I would affirm their response and question further or move on to the next question.

An initial development of an interview guide was created along the basis of the previously researched theories in the first three chapters. The questions were created to cover both specific cases and the general opinions of the interviewees. The categories covered are: Profile of the interviewee, Newsroom support, General state of investigative journalism, Investigative impact on democracy, Governmental barriers, Professionalization, and Societal impact. Within these key themes, the guide contained a variety of specific questions related to the journalist's reporting and general questions related to the state of journalism as a whole. The questions served as a loose script and were asked and expanded upon depending on what the participant covered in their previous answers. The audio files from the extracted recorded meetings were then

transcribed using an online transcriber and re-checked so that the acronyms and pronouns could be corrected manually.

Table 2: *Interview guide questions*

Category	Specific	General
Profile / Experience	How long have you worked as a journalist?	
	Can you tell me about your past in journalism? In what sections have you worked?	
	Have you had experience abroad (in which countries/how do they differ from the Philippines)?	
	Have you always worked in press/TV/radio...?	
	Can you share a particularly challenging investigative story you worked on and how you overcame the obstacles you faced?	
Newsroom support	Do you feel you have the support of your editors (board of administration) when covering complicated matters?	
	What can you tell me about specific situations when you felt the lack of support (or the opposite)?	
	[In case they have experience in different newsrooms] how do they compare them in terms of support to journalism professionals?	
General state of investigative journalism	How do you perceive the current state of investigative journalism in the Philippines?	In your experience, what are the major barriers that influence the quality and quantity of investigative reporting produced in the Philippines?

Investigative Impact on Democracy		How do you think the current challenges facing investigative journalism in the Philippines impact the country's status as a transitional democracy?
		In your opinion, how is investigative journalism in the Philippines contributing to democratic consolidation?
		What role do investigative journalists play in promoting better governance and political development?
Governmental Barriers	Have you ever faced legal repercussions or threats due to your investigative work? Can you share any instances?	How do government regulations or legal constraints affect your work as an investigative journalist?
	Have you ever faced court charges related to your journalism work?	How would you characterize the level and nature of state intervention in the Philippine media?
	How has your perspective on investigative journalism evolved over your career, especially in light of governmental barriers?	What challenges do you encounter when seeking information from government sources?
Professionalization	How do barriers influence the topics you choose to investigate and report on?	What role does transparency play in the work of investigative journalists?
		how is this affected by governmental restrictions?
		How do investigative journalists maintain independence and credibility in a politically charged environment?
	What motivates you to continue your work in investigative journalism despite the challenges you face?	How do governmental barriers impact the autonomy of investigative journalists in the Philippines?
	What systems of accountability are in place for investigative journalists, and how effective are they?	

		How do investigative journalists in the Philippines navigate ethical challenges when facing governmental barriers?
Impact	What recommendations would you offer to policymakers, media organizations, and civil society groups to promote and protect investigative journalism in the Philippines?	How has investigative journalism in the Philippines influenced social and political movements?
		How has the Philippines' history influenced current practices in investigative journalism?

4.4. Data Analysis

To effectively analyze the provided data, this study utilized thematic analysis. Thematic analysis has been defined as a method of analyzing and reporting identified themes or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Thematic analysis is especially important, in the case of this study, in recognizing the most prominent governmental barriers to investigative journalists. Vaismoradi & Snelgrove (2019) explicate the characteristics of thematic analysis, explaining that because it is not tied to any specific theoretical framework, it makes it a versatile research tool. However, a research tool is only as effective as the researcher's utilization of it. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss the importance of researchers delving deep into their data to familiarize themselves with potential patterns. This aligns with the importance of doing an initial, manual analysis of the raw data collected to get a proper sense of the possible recurring themes. Castleberry & Nolen (2018) outline the steps of thematic analysis, beginning with data familiarization, creating initial codes, and identifying and naming themes.

As the analysis was inductive, it allowed larger patterns and themes to emerge from the data collected. The initial data analysis step consisted of manually reading through the interview data to find and create open codes across the interviews, relating to the research question it corresponds with. The open codes were always identified in at least more than one interview, through either literal wording by the participant or contextual. The open codes that were identified during this step are displayed in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: *Dimensions of Analysis for RQ1*

RQ1: What are the prominent barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines?		
Dimensions of Analysis	Categories	Examples of participants' words
Discrediting the press	censoring; harassment; red-tagging; Defamation	bad-mouthing of the press; harassed; Red-tag; Compromises safety; Anti-government; Dismiss your story; Frenchie Mae Cumpio; Maria Ressa; libelous; criminal offense; DDS; cyber libel
Journalist profession-related killings	lethal intimidation; Verbal intimidation; Physical intimidation; Killings	Killings; tailed by a known individual in a motorcycle or in a vehicle; text messages and calls threatening you; late at night
Self-censorship	Stopping a story for fear of their safety; Toning down the gravity of the story	Influence; Tone down; Sensitive
Ignoring journalists	No information given by authority sources; Rejected interview	ignoring me; straight-up snubbed
Legal newsroom support	larger organizations providing good legal support; editorial support	in-house lawyer; group of lawyers and attorneys; access to legal counsel
Newsroom guidance	Overall positive newsroom support; Editorial board support	editorial guidance; veteran journalists; guide

Resources	less financial and resource support for smaller organizations; alternative outlet resource disparity	small organizations; community newspapers; spread thin; funding
eFOI/FOI	Information access improved but still difficult; Local vs. main office response	FOI; gathering of information; blockade of information; red-tape; answer
Social media	Power of social media to engage audience; Multimedia approach	TikTok; influencers; newer media
Format	Engagement of newer & younger generation; Interest in personality-based and shorter forms	newer media; multimedia fashion; interest; new generation; personality base; viral
Public trust	Filipino public trust in journalism; Public perception of journalists' roles	public agenda; trustworthiness
Public distrust and misinformation	Filipino public's distrust in media information and outlets; Low readership and support	Doubt; Biased blogs; Ratings; respect
Banning journalists	Administration efforts to restrict information; No access to official events	banned from press conferences; banned from presidential palace
Investigative journalism not being pursued	Lack of interest from individuals; news outlets disadvantage to pursue investigative stories	pursued; too capital intensive; interest
News practices	How Filipino media handles news stories; Journalists' role and expectation	statement of asset and liability; tone down the story; parking stories; system of feedback
Ethical issues	Ethical challenges within the profession; Routine	ethical challenges; ethical burdens; persistence; part of the job

Culture of impunity	Governmental attitude towards attacks on the press; Culture of impunity	Impunity; atmosphere
To improve in profession	Recommendations to protect and promote investigative journalism; Systemic change; Individual change	join union; expand union reach; de-vilifying the press; expanding information access; fund investigative journalism
Covid-19 pandemic	Effect of the pandemic on journalism; Impactful economic events	pandemic; Covid question; stressful
Election	Influence on elections; Politically charged year	did not attend the public debate; election year
Examples of journalism defenders	Historical journalists involved in fight for journalism	Maria Ressa; democracy fighters; Ellen Tordesillas
Public interest in investigative journalism	Public interest in investigative journalism; Interest in long-form journalism	trust in traditional media; interest is there; feedback; open email
Legal cases against journalists	Particular cases of legal suits against interviewees/companies; Libel/cyberlibel lawsuits; Lack of protective laws	sued; filed cases against journalists; Rappler; privacy laws; no laws that directly protect journalists from state-sponsored violence

Table 4: *Dimensions of Analysis for RQ2*

RQ2: How do the investigative barriers impact the democratic status of the Philippines as a transitional democracy?		
Dimensions of Analysis	Properties	Examples of participants' words

Perception of democratic state of the Philippines	Symbiotic relationship between democratic status and journalism; Influence of elections on journalism	Democratic; manipulated; politically charged; correlation
Social movements caused by journalism	Influential journalism on the public; Revolutionary leaders	Uprising; Revolution; Ousting; mass participation; Mosquito journalism
Restrictive Press state during Marcos Sr. administration	Authoritarian regime; Anti-press administration	Dictator; dictatorship; martial law; memorialize martial law; Human rights; Economy; Poverty; Injustices
Informationally progressive press state during Aquino administration	information access; semi-effective FOI bill	FOI; executive order; Access; Requests; Human rights; Economy; Poverty; Injustices
Effective press during Estrada administration	Recurring issues; journalism paved the way for an ousting	Human rights; Economy; Poverty; Injustices; ousting
Deteriorative press state during Duterte administration	poor information access; negative attitude towards press; anti-press rhetoric	deterioration of the state of press freedom; attempt to keep some specific stories down; human rights abuses; drug war; harassed; Human rights; Economy; Poverty; Injustices

More open press state during Marcos Jr. administration	openness; improvement; sensitive	sensitive; more open attitude; fake news helped them gain a seat back in power; Better than 30 years ago; Human rights; Economy; Poverty; Injustices
---------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

To review and mark the interviews manually, I added the interviews to Taguette²⁶, a free and open-source online analysis tool. I then marked certain words into the dimensions of analysis, of which the tool highlighted and saved the categories. After the initial open coding was conducted, a second round of manual coding was done to ensure proper analysis through *axial coding*. During this phase, similar open codes were manually merged together and renamed to create a relevant code or a main category that relates to the research question. The merging of these codes was based on patterns between the open codes. After identifying the axial codes, selective codes that are relevant to both the open and axial codes were chosen, as shown in Table 5. The benefit of this process is: “the open, axial, and selective coding strategy enables a cyclical and evolving data loop in which the researcher interacts, is constantly comparing data and applying data reduction, and consolidation technique” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 47). By frequently reviewing the data, the researcher becomes more acquainted with it, leading to the identification of more codes and the refinement of the existing ones.

Table 5: *Axial and Selective Codes*

Dimensions of Analysis	Axial codes	Selective code
Restrictive Press state during Marcos Sr. administration; Informationally progressive press state during Aquino administration; Accountable press during Estrada administration; Deteriorative press state during Duterte administration; More open press state during Marcos Jr. administration	Non-linear progression of positive press state	Press state is heavily dependent on administration

²⁶ Taguette: Taguette. (n.d.). Retrieved 28 July 2024, from <https://www.taguette.org/>

Erosion of press freedom; weakened accountability; chilling effect on free speech; rise of disinformation; undermining democratic processes; Perception of democratic state of the Philippines; Election	Press Freedom impacts on Democracy	An anti-press government attitude results in a restricted press
Journalist profession-related killings and intimidation	Verbal & physical intimidation tactics	
lack of resources for small news outlets; COVID-19 pandemic; elections	Economic constraints	More journalism funding is needed
social media; format; public trust; public interest in investigative journalism; social movements caused by journalism; Culture of impunity; Public Distrust and Misinformation	Public engagement and perception of the media	Investigative journalism methods must adapt to retain public interest
news practices; newsroom guidance; legal newsroom support; ethical issues; influence on stories	Professionalization	Internal practices are dependent on newsroom support
ignoring journalists; banning journalists; eFOI/FOI	Direct information barriers	Lack of protective laws for journalists
Legal issues and lack of protective laws	Legal problems for journalists	

4.5. Limitations of the Methodology

The overall methodology, while effective, can also contain several limitations that should be taken into account. There is an opening for potential biases with this method, as the coding was conducted after writing the theoretical portion. Here, this raises the concern of an introduction of biases due to the influence of prior knowledge and preconceptions of the topic. This was considered through several rounds of coding to leave as little room for bias as possible. Additionally, the small sample size of journalists limits the amount of data available for analysis, which might not allow for a comprehensive representation of the experiences and views that Filipino journalists experience overall. With a larger time period and a higher number of accepted participants, it could have benefited the study in drawing broader conclusions about the challenges in the profession. However, their responses were taken into account not only based on their personal experience but also the observed experience of the newsroom in which they worked, helping to compensate for the limitations imposed by the small sample size.

Additionally, as I was seeking for more quality over quantity, fewer interviews gave me more time to analyze the five that were conducted.

5. Results

The interviews brought substantial points regarding the questions of what the current and most prominent barriers to investigative journalism are in the Philippines, as well as how the investigative barriers impact the democratic status of the Philippines as a transitional democracy. They provided valuable insight into the particular and shared experiences of Filipino journalists, as revealed through semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic and axial coding analysis. Selected quotes from the interviews are incorporated to emphasize the overall findings and provide greater detail of the participants' experiences. This way, as Patton (2002) mentions, the data interpretations can be properly represented by the participant's views. The findings create a broader context on how these multifaceted challenges collectively shape the landscape of investigative journalism in the country. Through this analysis, we can begin to see how the implications of these barriers affect the profession as well as the country's democratic status.

Press state is heavily dependent on administration: Non-linear progression of positive press state

Every interviewee gave comparisons between administrations, mentioning as far back as the Marcos Sr. administration to the current Marcos Jr. administration. Participant 5 noted that: "The other administrations are, you know, there's a kind of hostility, but it is not as bad as the past 30 years." Participant 1 mentioned that they had been working in the journalistic profession for more than three presidential administrations, and there has been a noticeable change in attitude towards the journalism profession with each. Each interviewee seemed to provide the past administrations as indicators of the present, comparing the effects of a previous administration on the press to the modern day. While the attitude towards journalism has shifted from each administration, there appeared to be a high impact of the government's direct behavior towards the press, through rhetoric or legislative decisions. The state of the press, therefore, was directly impacted by the country's democratic state and strongly acknowledged by the journalists interviewed.

An Anti-Press Government Attitude Results in a Restricted Press

a. Impact on Democracy

There appeared to be a unanimous agreement amongst the participants that journalism has a direct effect on the democratic status of the Philippines, through various means. Participant 1 stated that although the official status of the Philippines is democratic, they view it differently: "Legally, we are democratic. But in essence, I don't think we are." Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned the perceived democratic status and expanded upon the discussion, stating:

This is the ironic part: we are one of the freest press in Asia. Freest in the sense that there's a constitutional guarantee, regarding the fact that no one shall be passed abridging, among others, freedom of the press. But as we always tell... those who are interested to know, what's written on paper is not something that's actually implemented. So you may have freedom of speech, but freedom after speech, what happens to you afterward, would be another matter altogether. (Participant 5)

The distinction between what the country is perceived as and the ongoing struggles that journalists face is made apparent through the lens of these journalists, who perceive that the country's free status has not yet been fully implemented in the news media sector. Participant 2 states: "It's so sad that in a democratic country, we still have laws that can easily be manipulated to attack journalists". This is reflective, as stated in the earlier chapters, of the unstable nature of transitional democracies and the difficulties in systematically implementing democratic practices. An issue with simply judging a country's press freedom at face value is that it does not take into account the whole process, that is, monitoring and ensuring that those freedoms are being upheld. Participant 4 notes the relationship between democracy and investigative journalism:

It's more stable if journalists are able to look into the processes and question the processes and investigate the processes. So I think there is a correlation between a healthy practice of investigative journalism and a healthy democracy. (Participant 4)

The symbiotic connection between the two influences the outcomes that are generated. This democratic influence has, in turn, reshaped the internal practices of journalists.

b. Verbal & Physical Intimidation tactics

The interviewees acknowledged cases of verbal or physical intimidation tactics that had happened to them either directly or to one of their colleagues. Their responses most commonly included red-tagging, mysterious calls and texts, and anti-press rhetoric.

Red-tagging is especially severe in a country where such labels can lead to major consequences. Participant 2 describes how it turns not only the tide of power against the journalist, but their community as well:

That's how they dismiss your story that, oh, that's why, this journalist was able to write this story because he or she is anti-governed. So, it will seemingly say that these are just makeup stories. So the intimidation is even more growing because, the community or the populace that you wanted to inform with the kind of stories that is also having their second thoughts that, oh, you're a dangerous individual. You are a member of a terrorist organization. You are anti-government. (Participant 2)

The scope of such attacks extends beyond just the journalists themselves, but their families as well, as displayed poignantly by an interviewee:

So the editor-in-chief and I... we've been red-tagged as individuals. So, it endangers not just our own security, our own personal lives, but it also compromises the safety and security of our loved ones, of our, you know, family members. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 and Participant 2, though holding different positions of power and experience within their news organizations, both mention the presence of red-tagging, or the act of accusing journalists of being communists or terrorists, in their work. This act rose significantly during the Duterte administration by the government themselves, as discussed by the interviewees. Participant 3 talked about how her editor was accused by President Duterte of a conspiracy theory trying to oust him. These instances came after the participants or their colleagues had written stories about high-profile figures or organizations. This pattern might suggest that red-tagging is being used by government officials deliberately to silence investigative reporters when the stories concern them.

Other anti-press rhetoric was a prevalent theme that all participants mentioned at some point of the interview. Participant 3 discussed her editor's issues with President Duterte, mentioning him calling her a "presstitute" and other bad-mouthing actions. Participant 4 also highlights the

Duterte administration, where President Duterte “uttered cuss words against journalists”. A lack of response to red-tagging or an active measure to discredit journalists by the government, as the participants discuss, leads to a culture of impunity. These factors, in turn affects the perception of journalism, enhancing a lack of respect for the profession and impacts the public perception.

However, not all actions illustrated by the participants were purely verbal. Participants 2 and 3 talked extensively of unknown calls and motorcycles or cars tailing them at night:

This is not just my experience, but this is the common experience of all. When you go to big politicians, ask for their side. Right after that, you will go home being tailed by an unknown individual in a motorcycle or in a vehicle that was trying to arrest. Things you can see in the movies are happening in real life in the Philippines. You will be receiving text messages and calls threatening you. (Participant 2)

during that course of the assignment, I think it was, like, days before the story was published, I was getting, like, weird calls as well. They would not introduce themselves. They would just stay silent, make noises, and this was, like, late at night. (Participant 3)

Participant 2’s accounting of the situation as “common experience of all” indicates that perhaps methods of intimidation such as these are more normalized or expected by Filipino journalists, given their frequency. These threats are aimed to psychologically intimidate journalists, encouraging them to stop pursuing stories on powerful figures and perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Economic Constraints

Within the discussion of internal practices for each interviewee’s experience in the newsroom, a common threaded theme within all the discussions were the lack of resources for individual journalists and their newsrooms. This was commonly associated with the lack of funding and a particularly intense focus on smaller news outlets.

Participants 2 and 3 note the financial gravity that smaller organizations must face:

When we go to journalists who work with small organizations, who barely earn a hundred or two, they have the most fear to carry. (Participant 2)

For this time, we had newspapers and not newspapers, but online newspapers closed down. And then we have community newspapers closing now also because of, well, yes, because of finances. (Participant 3)

The inability to pay out legal fees puts a greater probability of self-censorship and fear in reporters. This is exacerbated by impactful economic events, such as in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic or an election year. Participant 4 also highlights the change he has seen in the profession, noting that there is less funding for investigative pieces now than there was before. Participant 5 focuses on smaller, alternative media outlet issues, illustrating the measures that journalists must sometimes take to continue their work:

In the alternative media, we have no concept. Well, not really concept, but we don't consider whatever we get for funding as income or as revenue. It's not as if we give salaries to people. I mean, I've been with Bulatlat since 2001. And I have been having zero income with them...When Bulatlat was still starting, when we were short on funds, sometimes I would be the one to shell out money for food during production work. I mean, I'm willing to do that. Not because I'm rich, not because I have a lot of money, but because I believe in that. (Participant 5)

The lack of a consistent revenue for alternative outlets discourages the growth of local news outlets, impacting media diversity in the Philippines. Additionally, the sacrifices that journalists have to make, such as what Participant 5 mentioned, may impact their mental and financial health, affecting the journalists and possible investigative stories that they would have pursued and endangering journalistic independence.

Professionalization

Every interviewee mentioned the professionalization of their workplace, whether it was through internal practices or the support they received. Interestingly, the journalists all pointed to the positive and frequent support of their editors, veteran journalists, and legal newsroom support. Participants 1 and 4 discuss the newsroom benefit of an in-house lawyer in case of legal trouble, allowing them extra room to pursue higher-profile stories. The participants noted that they did not face barriers from their colleagues, instead, they found approval and guidance from them.

Despite this support, the shape of the industry appeared to be greatly impacted by the experienced or anticipated retaliative efforts from external factors. The participants described the

impact that journalism consequences have on their choice to pursue certain stories, mentioning the decision to forgo certain leads due to safety concerns: “The ethical burden is justified when you choose your life over publishing a story” (Participant 2).

Additionally, the popularity of investigative journalism is not only dependent on the audience, but the investors and journalists themselves.

Investigative work is more of a side project for, like, reporters who do that daily grind. So, you know, it's just time constraints as well and the restrictions. It just kinda forces these stories to be set aside. (Participant 2)

Investigative journalism is not being pursued by many news media organizations...Many media owners see it as too capital intensive because you have to spend a lot of money for an output that would take several weeks to be produced and distributed, as compared to a news article that would be finished in just, you know, a few minutes or even a few hours. So the culture in many of these media organizations is quantity over quality of journalistic output. (Participant 5)

The result of these constraints is a reluctance among media organizations to pursue investigative journalism, which can be attributed to several factors. Because investigative journalism is often expensive and time-consuming, requiring journalists to spend a lengthy amount of time researching and gathering evidence, it can often lead to legal challenges from the subjects of their investigations. Investigative journalism can also be dangerous, where journalists may face physical or verbal threats and harassment from the people they are investigating. In addition, investigative journalism can be controversial. It can expose corruption and wrongdoing, and it can lead to public outcry, which might make it difficult for media organizations to publish investigative stories, as they may fear backlash from the public or advertisers. Due to these factors, individuals and organizations in the Philippines seem to refrain from fully investing their time and trust in investigative journalism. Additionally, since it is recognized by the journalists themselves, it may reduce motivation to continue in the field.

Direct Information Barriers

In addition to the financial challenges that the investigative journalists faced, every interviewee mentioned the issue of access to information, whether through individual or broad means. The restrictions were not linked to any particular administration, as the Aquino, Duterte, and Marcos

Jr. administrations were most frequently mentioned concerning information access. One of the main mentioned factors of access difficulty is the FOI Act. Though the participants all acknowledged that information accessibility has improved since past administrations, the functioning of the eFOI site since its introduction seems to continue having difficulties, as stated by Participant 3:

But, even if you put in, like, formal requests and stuff like that, they don't get back to you. I felt that part of it was really just an attempt to keep some specific stories down, especially those that were related to drug wars, the human rights abuses that were happening during the Duterte administration. And that kind of, I guess, blockade of information, it kind of intensified during the pandemic as well because everything was online. (Participant 3)

Participant 1 described the attempted curtailing of journalists' requests by demanding the requests be made directly, instead of through the site.

I was doing investigations on elections. They were just, instead of requesting my needs, my documents, through the FOI website, they wanted me to do the request directly to the office. And because it's directly to the office, I have had extreme tests that they don't want it, like DOE or, yeah, DNR. If you go to the main office here in Manila, they would say yes. If you go to the provinces, they're not going to answer you. (Participant 1)

The process of direct requests is more time-consuming and uncertain, as the officials can ignore you without consequence. By contrast, an official request made on the FOI site demands that there be a response, whether it is acceptance or rejection, after a certain time-period. Participant 1 also touches upon the disparity between smaller, local offices and larger ones like the main office in Manila. This leaves local reporters outside of Manila disadvantaged in information access. Participant 3 also touches upon the information access issue by stating that one of their colleagues was been banned from the Presidential Palace for asking questions that were too hard-hitting:

So, it is a balancing act because on one hand, you want to provide news that is, of course, balanced, that is accurate, that is able to, you know, help Filipinos make these informed decisions amid this, like, super, politically charged environment. But, at the same time, journalists here do face that problem of, again, it all goes back to access because they aren't able to ask something that's a little too sensitive sometimes for some officials. (Participant 3)

This encourages an attitude of not only pandering to officials but also neglecting the critical nature of reporting. This, if left unchecked, can create a culture of corruption not only in the subjects of the stories but the actors in the news media industry.

Legal Problems for Journalists

All participants mentioned legal issues for journalists in the form of libel. Their statements demonstrate the broader issues of using law as weapons to stifle dissent:

So, when you say decriminalized, you have to remove the prospects of imprisonment if you are convicted of libel because right now, it's being weaponized by certain characters. (Participant 5)

Well, they would find different grounds, like, for example, libel. Or in the case of Rappler, they would say that we violated business rules in the Philippines or taxation rules in the Philippines, which are not true, of course. (Participant 4)

Participant 5's use of the term "weaponized" indicates that libel laws are not being used for the purpose of proper self-protection, as intended, but rather as a way to silence journalists who attempt to change their reputation status. Participant 4's recounting of his newsroom experience supports this, emphasizing that even prominent news outlets like Rappler can be subjected to unfair legal standards. Participant 2 illustrates the uncertainty of a legal case being filed against journalists after publishing a story:

When I published that story, it took a couple of months, maybe six, before I received a notice that I was sued for such a story. And the sponsor of the suit is the incumbent mayor of that time. And fortunately, it did not prosper. But still, the idea that it may happen again and again is haunting not just me, but us. (Participant 2)

The delayed legal notice creates an uncomfortable tension of unpredictability, making it much more difficult for the journalist to anticipate what they need to do to protect themselves. The fact that it was the mayor at the time that filed the suit demonstrates the uneven power dynamics that authority figures have over journalists. Without robust legal protections, the participant could not defend themselves adequately.

The alternate risk of libel cases against journalists is not only in the implications for the journalists' credibility, but the diversion of attention from the important investigative pieces to

the legal case. With a shifted narrative, the focus on those attempted to be held accountable is lost.

Public Engagement and Perception of the Media

The promotion of investigative journalism so it is pursued contributes not only to the credibility of the profession but the societal role in embracing the democratic values that it upholds. The participants all spoke of the major influential role that investigative journalism has had on social and political movements. With this, they all noted that the journalism format has evolved with a younger audience, using multimedia formats and social media, namely TikTok. Participant 1 notes that this is not only due to the common public using social media, but a large shift in the audience profiles as well:

I mean, our readers are getting young, who want more instant reports, more visually, rather than going through a long-form report. So, you have, actually, the Philippines is just figuring out now how to really explain investigative reports in a younger generation. But they are still interested. But how do you capture them to get into reading that story, to see that essence? So, we're still figuring it out. (Participant 1)

The mentioned difficulty in maintaining interest seems to be specific to investigative journalism, as its long-form format often differs from quick, bite-sized reports. When addressing a younger generation, who is more frequently exposed to shorter and more instant content, the participants are conscious of the need to incorporate this novel format for the investigative pieces while still maintaining the integrity of the story. Despite the popularity of newer media, Participant 3 talks about the difficulty in convincing the public to put their trust in alternative forms:

The difference in how the public perceives my work as a TV journalist compared to, like, my work as an online journalist...I guess there's definitely more doubt towards, like, newer media. (Participant 3)

Due to her experience working in different formats, the participant noticed that there was still more trust amongst Filipinos towards TV versus online publications. This skepticism may be due to the ease in which misinformation can proliferate quicker online, or the difference in ethical standards between formats.

In addition to format, the story selection itself is a large factor in audience engagement. Participant 5 discusses the benefits, however, that technology has provided for engagement metrics:

Engagement with audiences, there are no mechanisms for that. So unlike in the 1980's or the 1990's where sometimes you don't know or you have no idea as to how people received your work or whether or not it's being read at all, now you know, it gets viral. You have real time data. You have real time metrics, to assess what kind of, which part audiences would appreciate in terms of topics that you write about.

The availability of such data allows for greater selection of stories that will retain the public's interest and perhaps broaden their audience. This, in turn, might influence the stories chosen in order to generate funding for investigative journalism. However, there could be some questions raised in concern for this approach, as more popular stories with a higher demand does not always equate to important or critically pertinent topics. In a country as prolific in sensationalism or "yellow journalism" as the Philippines, this poses a danger to the profession and the public's trust in news outlets, paving the way for higher social and political division.

The culmination of the restrictions and negative impositions on journalists and the impact on democratic value and perception all lead to the socio-cultural atmosphere of journalism and how it is perceived. The importance of promoting investigative relates not only to the quality of current journalists, but the encouragement of aspiring journalists as well. If the profession is met with such blatant mistrust, disrespect, and financial difficulty, this might discourage young reporters from furthering their careers in journalism. Participant 1 touches upon this with her mention of a general lack of pursuit for journalists, as "Most of us look for money". Instead, she says that many go for jobs in the call center or in marketing. This suggests that if journalism was more financially stable as a profession, it could entice more people to pursue it as a career.

Recommendations

The participants all offered varied recommendations to improve the plight of investigative journalism in the Philippines that focused on different challenges. The recommendations were mainly targeted at the government and policymakers, while the recommendations made for

individual journalists by Participants 2 and 5 were to take proactive measures to protect themselves. The recommendations were divided into two sections:

Systemic change: These calls are made for systemic reform through institutional change, which is possible only through the actions of the government and policymakers. Some prominent changes discussed involve information access, legal protections, and apparent support, and an increase in funding:

Not just free access, but an established access to documents, to transactions, or even to people. (Participant 1)

For the government, impose policies that will protect the genuine freedom of speech, decriminalize libel, and create policies that will give assistance to journalists who are facing trump up charges. Make the legal remedies available and accessible for all journalists. For the union, expand more your reach because we have the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines or the NUJP, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines. Expand more your reach, reach more individuals who are in in the far-flung areas, who are in the outskirts of the country. (Participant 2)

I think the core of it all is really people just aren't aware of, like, what we do and why we do the things that we do. So I think, like, it really boils down to the education that, like, the young like, as early as kinder or maybe, like, 1st grade. Basic media literacy...I think we can still go, much younger. Just really introducing that, idea of, you know, just really promoting these fundamentals of, like, truth, why it's important to be telling it, why it's important to be believing in it and verifying what you know. Because once I feel like once Filipinos have these basic skills and maybe from there, they can be thought about, you know, new sorry, news, journalism, and know what the role of journalism is in society...And number two, really improving that freedom of information. And I guess they can also start, since, money is also an important aspect of investigative journalism. I think one thing they could also do is lift the Duterte administration's restrictions on accessing the statements of assets, liabilities, and net worth of public officials...So I guess it all boils down to those two main things. Really, one, education, de vilifying the press and what we do, and improving that access so we're able to have these stories. And, you know, these stories, they do spark discourse about how we're running things and what we should be doing. And from there, I guess, you know, we're able to restore that freedom of the press here. (Participant 3)

I hope more people would fund investigative journalism across the globe because that would help a lot of countries and a lot of democracies and a lot of poor people who need journalists to investigate things for them (Participant 4)

End the culture of impunity. Stop the killings. I'm not saying that government is directly responsible. They're not the ones pulling the trigger, but they tend to create an atmosphere where the culture of impunity still continues because the slow pace of the

judicial system, for example, would tend to embolden those who would want to commit certain crimes against journalists (Participant 5)

Participants 1 and 3 discuss the need for better information access for all. While focusing on legal measures, Participant 2 also brings to light the journalists who are in “far-flung areas”, circling back to the differences in support between smaller, local outlets and larger organizations, of which they stated earlier. Participant 3 touches upon the more underlying concern of media literacy. Addressing this issue would improve the focus and appreciation for critical thinking, fostering a culture that promotes measures of accountability. Participant 4 focuses on the financial difficulties that the profession faces, noting that additional assistance for investigative journalism should also come from international bodies. This perhaps indicates that support from Filipino organizations is not sufficient. Participant 5 calls for an overall change in how the government treats abuses on the press, to end the culture of impunity.

Individual change: The necessity to take precautionary measures for individual journalists stems from the lack of systemic protections for journalists.

To individual journalists: join a union so that you will be organized, and you'll be part of an organization that would help you protect and help you give insights on how to protect yourselves. (Participant 2)

write your story, write your news, write your angles in such a way that would poke your audiences if you make your topics relatable to the ordinary people. If you use language that's more understandable like Filipino, then, there would be always available audiences for investigative reports. (Participant 5)

Participant 2 suggests a coping mechanism for journalists, in response to an absence of systemic protection. Participant 5's recommendation of professionalization improvements, through writing news in Filipino to garner attention, points to the attempt to increase public interest in investigative journalism. Both changes made internally by individual journalists are in attempt to improve the profession as a whole.

Discussion

After observing the results, I connected the findings to the theoretical framework presented in the earlier chapters and explored their implications for understanding journalism in an affected press freedom environment. The highlighted themes derived from the interviews connected their experiences and perceptions to the theoretical findings from previously observed scholars.

Press state is heavily dependent on administration: non-linear progression of positive press state

The relationship between the government and media was largely discussed amongst the participants, supporting the previous idea of the "government v. the media", achieved through anti-rhetoric and other intimidation tactics. This aligns with the idea that press freedom alters with the current administration's stance. This was particularly apparent during the Duterte regime, where the government was described as openly hostile towards the press. As previously discussed by Voltmer's theory of *political parallelism* (2006), this suggests that the media can be influenced by a political party, whether they are supported or undermined through various means. The heightened state involvement leads to increased media restrictions, validating theories that in transitional democracies, an anti-press attitude fosters a constrained journalistic environment. This supports the idea that in an environment as such, it risks an increase in homogenous or even reduced reporting.

An Anti-Press Government Attitude Results in a Restricted Press

Duterte's regime was described as particularly restrictive years for the press, as was mentioned by the participants. This was largely due to Duterte's attitude towards them, which was often made apparent by his rhetoric. The intense amount of verbal and physical intimidation tactics that is mentioned by the participants highlight the effects of impunity for perpetrators. Just as previous authors like Harrison and Pukallus (2018) discuss the self-censorship that occurs as a response, the participants illustrate some journalists abandoning a story for fear of their life. This supports the idea that a country without strong legal protections for journalists and an unhealthy democratic environment is more likely to have journalists who practice self-censorship.

Economic constraints

The insufficient funding available to journalists, which limits their ability to produce high-quality work, emphasizes the economic challenges faced by developing democracies, as discussed by scholars in earlier chapters (Lamat, 2007; Kim, 2003; Reinardy, 2012). During particularly demanding periods, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or election cycles, journalists may not be provided with adequate resources, or financial constraints may lead to downsizing altogether. This decline in the quality of journalism undermines the critical role of informing the public. In transitional democracies, which are more vulnerable to such events, the erosion of journalism's quality can diminish both accountability and civic participation. Additionally, the findings support the notion that market competition affects resource availability for news outlets. In the Philippines, smaller or alternative outlets appeared to struggle the most.

Professionalization

The large focus on professionalization of journalism suggests that the participants regard it to be an important factor in the industry. The emphasis on their expectations by the public and for themselves suggest that they perceive themselves to be watchdogs, with a duty to the people and to hold the government accountable, as scholars previously noted (Mellado & Dalen, 2017; Schultz, 1998). While the issue of professionalization was highlighted by participants, there was little discussion on the tabloidization and celebrity culture of news that scholars like Gloria (2000) and Radiamoda (2023) describe. Despite this, professionalization remains central to the quality of investigative journalism, with participants emphasizing the need for greater training and higher standards in the field. However, the lack of conversation around tabloidization suggests that it may not be as prominent an issue among the participants interviewed, though it remains still a critical factor in weakening the credibility of journalism as a whole in the Philippines.

Direct Information Barriers

Journalists highlighted difficulties in accessing information, reinforcing the importance of transparency and accountability. Although scholars (Ettema, 2007; Mellado & Dalen, 2017)

highlight deliberative democracy in ensuring that the media can function as a platform for citizen-government discourse, the participants' struggles to obtain reliable information suggest that this ideal is far from realized, further challenging the notion of democratic transparency in the Philippines. The journalists can only produce stories with what information is available, supporting the theory that to fulfill the accountability dynamic, journalists must be given the resources and there must be more transparency in government, as mentioned previously (Ingrams, 2018; Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). This uneven dynamic that the participants allude to support Stiglitz (2002) theory of asymmetrical information, which leads to further societal inefficiencies.

Legal Problems for Journalists

The participants' mention of their own or their colleagues' legal problems support the previous theory that legislative barriers affect the quality of their reporting and is especially prominent when reporting on government-related issues, as scholars such as Waisbord (2002) and Faris et.al (2023) addresses. This incorporates the idea that within an unprotected legal environment for journalists, it leaves more room to benefit the powerful rather than hold them to account. Proper protective laws for journalists against defamatory accusations is especially important in a transitional democracy, where strong legal institutions are paramount to moving into consolidation.

Public Engagement and Perception of the Media

The impact of previous authoritarian regimes is still present in modern media, as participants noted that the shadow of the Marcos Sr. and Duterte's regime still lingers on current administrations. This supports the theory that history influences the public perception of the media and can impact the critical nature of the profession (Bertrand, 2000; Bourdieu, 1998; Jereza, 2020). The importance of the public's reception of the media is apparent, as they determine not only the metrics of the outlet's success but the tide of public change. If the public, including government officials, are willing to accept the critical nature of investigative journalism, it can encourage a culture of accountability.

Conclusion

This study has explored the significant barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines and the subsequent implications on the country's democracy. Through the critical and thematic analysis of the five interviews conducted with Filipino journalists, the study illustrated just how complex the dynamic between press freedom and the democratic state is, revealing the common and unexpected factors that shape investigative reporting. The analysis revealed key themes, the first being that the state of press freedom is non-linear, instead evolving with the tide of politics. This suggests the fragility of press freedom within transitional democracies, emphasizing the importance of journalist protection and support. The results of the study reinforce the critical impact of legislative and non-legislative threats on journalists' ability to hold the powerful accountable, weakening the democratic process and institutions. Significant barriers of a lack of information access are exacerbated by legal standards, such as the FOI act, and the cultural approach of governmental officials towards journalists. In addition to unfair treatment towards journalists, there remain many verbal and physical attacks. The perpetrators of these attacks, often by government or government-associated figures, perpetuate a climate of fear and a culture of normalization and impunity. Despite these challenges, surprising findings were revealed: Filipino newsrooms seem to be leaning towards ethical standards and increased professionalization, with a strong degree of internal support for investigative journalists by their editors and colleagues regarding morale and legal protections. However, there still remains a lack of interest to pursue investigative journalism, as it is financially consuming and time-draining. This is reinforced by the public perception that investigative journalism is not properly valued, which reduces its effectiveness in mobilizing public opinion against wrongdoing. These factors highlight the cruciality of intervention through systemic change to properly support the profession to overcome the barriers that were presented in the study. These methods of support can include providing financial support, protecting the journalists from violence and disallowing a culture of impunity, and promoting and educating the public about investigative journalism so as to increase interest and support. While this study provided valuable insights into the barriers faced by investigative journalists in the Philippines, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of five journalists, while it gave in-depth discussions of their experiences, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to include a broader range

of participants from different regions of the country and more news outlets to capture a more diverse set of experiences. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of bias, as journalists may be reluctant to fully disclose certain challenges due to personal concerns. This could possibly be addressed in future studies by open-ended anonymous survey methods to encourage more open responses. Additionally, a longitudinal study following changes in press freedom under different political administrations could provide a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of governmental barriers to journalism, especially within a transitional democracy. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the existing body of scientific knowledge by offering a detailed analysis of the barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines within the context of a transitioning democracy. It highlights how government-media relations, economic constraints, legal obstacles, and professionalization issues collectively shape the media landscape in a way that limits press freedom. For the journalism community, this research emphasizes the critical importance of addressing these challenges through collective advocacy for legal protections and economic support. On a societal scale, this study underscores the role of a free and independent press in safeguarding democratic processes and offers a call to action for policymakers, civil society organizations, and the public to support press freedom as an essential pillar of democracy. Without a stable and strong investigative press, the Philippines risks weakening its democratic institutions. Through these steps, the Philippines can be able to ensure that the public continues having access to the information it needs to help shape democratic norms and values through informed decisions.

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Appendix

Interview 1

[Participant 1] Hello? Hi. Sorry. I'm still on the road. Hi.

[Interviewer] No worries. Yeah. It's okay. Yeah. If you need to do just audio, that's also fine.

[Participant 1] Yes. I just have to get out later. But, yeah, you can do the interview. Okay. Thank you so much. I'm sorry.

[Interviewer] No problem. Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you again for pushing it to today. I'm just going to use this data for my thesis, which is on barriers to investigative journalism in the Philippines. And you have lots of experience in that. You work for the Philippines Center For Investigative Journalism. You've written stories on legal issues and the government administration. So you've done a lot of investigative work, which is great. And with that and just all your former experience in mind, just how do you, perceive the current state of investigative journalism in the Philippines?

[Participant 1] Actually, I would like to answer that through the difference with the president. Sure. Yeah. Because, I mean, I'm quite old already. So, I've been in journalism so I have had the I have been, a journalist for, like, 3 questions already. And working for 3 presidents already. And, if you come in from G and A, Royal, and then you go to, there's a link with the investigation. It says easier access to documents that they've passed to government officials. And then from final economics, you go to, the pandemic. Although, it says it is open to PDF, but access is difficult. I mean, like, for, Aquino, we had an, FOI, not really bill executive order on for information because the bill cannot pass through the congress. So, yeah, he just made that executive order. And then he had, like, a website, eFOI, which you can access all documents you can request to different government agencies through that request, through that website. And all agencies are obliged to answer your email within 10 days. Sending pending. So you get, there's an sure answer from that. And then you go to the testing. The website doesn't work anymore. I

mean, everybody it's still there. The website's still there. From the very time, I was requesting documents. I was doing investigations on elections. They were just, instead of requesting my needs, my documents, through the FOI website, they wanted me to do the request directly to the office. And because it's directly to the office, I have had extreme tests that they don't want it, like DOE or, yeah, DNR. If you go to the main office here in Manila, they would say yes. If you go to the provinces, they're not going to answer you. So I had to like, for the ENR, I had I requested documents on, Palawan for Palawan, rainforest because they wouldn't they would ignore me. I requested from the main office in the in Manila and then asked them to endorse it to allow 1. Those kind of difficulties in terms of document access.

[Interviewer] So you would say these are the, some of the major barriers that barriers that affect the quality and quantity of your work?

[Participant 1] So, like, for like, right now, we're still pushing for an FOI bill, but I think I mean, we're just hoping for it. I don't think that's going to happen in this administration. Yeah. Especially if, I don't know if you've seen --- report on, the access of Maranian Reporter Mark Matthew and Markot, they're having difficulties with that. So if they're a Malakanyan partner, and then you're having difficulties to for documents, to press release it, or even to reschedule.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And with this information access, like, the, the Philippines is considered, a democracy, but a transitional democracy. Right? So, like, how do you think this impacts the study the country's, democratic status, with these barriers in mind?

[Participant 1] Actually, although we are legally a democracy, but in essence, I don't think we are. I mean yeah. If you look into our reports of student filling, just in this administration, we have already 135 just in this administration. So, I mean, the math system yeah. We're trying. I mean, legally, we are, but in actuality, I don't think so. So you have to look ways to get into that system. So, yeah, it's, like, more of, like, for me, I know how to do it because I was once an employee in a government agency. So I know how to do it. I know where to go because they are ignoring me. I know who to talk to.

[Interviewer] And so, like, with that in mind, the level and nature of state intervention in Philippine media is, generally would you say was it generally high or, like, with media capture?

[Participant 1] Actually, it's more of an irony. They say in the press, it's I mean, in our constitution, we have a confess, but access has been very difficult. And we have, like yeah. For this time, we had newspapers and not newspapers, but online newspapers closed down. And then we have community newspapers closing now also because of, well, yes, because of finances. But at the same time, because we've had a red flag for his reporters. So those cases and then we also had a- if I don't know if you've heard of --. She's already been based on for 4 years, and she they're using cyber libel again. But it's not new. I mean, it's just a report that she did digits again. So she's been there for 4 years. Yeah. So, I mean, yeah, literal. I mean, we are democratic, but in essence, I don't think we are.

[Interviewer] And for your investigative work, have you ever faced, for example, legal repercussions or threats because of your investigative work?

[Participant 1] Actually, because in ECCA, we have a lawyer, an in-house lawyer. So before we get, we get the story out although we have those, we think that the one this far is not really, that sensitive. But it is case to do. We have lawyer inside the company, and that lawyer looks into the article before it gets published. So just in case we say something, or usually, not acceptable or just saving somebody, or we will be questioned. And we do have a lawyer. And I think most of, the media institutions here in the Philippines, I mean, in Manila has their own debt lawyer.

[Interviewer] And so with these governmental restrictions that we talked about, I know that transparency for, in internal the internal profession of journalism is really important. How does especially for investigative journalists, I imagine, how would the transparency of, within the work of investigative journalists, how is this affected by, like, transparency and ethics within the profession? How would you say that this is affected by governmental restrictions?

[Participant 1] Yeah. Actually, I mean, it's a journalist processing or even outside the Philippines. That's we do not, delay in one hour. So, like, if she just says that there's something

wrong here, yeah, we had to look for documents. And, I mean, you just have to get into that system. Although it's hard harder because not everybody wants to be coded, especially you're going to the government offices. The janitor won't say, I want to be called. But this is, like, the janitor will tell you there's something wrong here. Like that. So you have to get just, more person. You just have to find your way. Yeah. Find your way in the system. So yeah. I mean, especially, like, in the government also, before documents are harder to access, you have to appear that you know there is that document. You have to make them yeah. It's like you're sure they have that document. So before I can say something, I have to be sure I have that there is a physical problem. Because if I ask them, they would always deny. Everything I mean, it's not just like a legal paper that you there's a restaurant. What or what is also important is the, concession, like, how do you call Interoffice document. Although not all government agencies, put that out, but it's also that it's because that, interoffice memorandum has, date, the important date, the people who know that kind of, transaction. So it's not just one document. It gives them support. You have to link it to the whole receipt. It's like if you want to go, how is this, I don't know if you've read also. We have this report on a power plant. And, being obstructed in the near and but it's Bahrain in 5 days, but I'm here. So we had to look into how, why did this happen? Why was it allowed? But because we cannot just yet, like, who approved that. So we had to look into a different, but I mean, they report. We had to look to, this is support because of our affiliates. Like, this company is actually an affiliate of, Merrell. So we had to look into those things. So it's not just one line, one kind of deal. To, yeah, get into that system.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. I see. And you you've said that you've worked through a few in administrations, which have been, you know, very different from each other and at the same time, in some aspects similar. And how do investigative journalists, like, maintain credibility in, an environment that's so politically charged and, divisive?

[Participant 1] Actually, here in the Philippines, we have the documents that's fixed by step. So, like, I don't know if you include on of statement of asset and liability, liability can at work, All, government employees are obliged with that. So we submit that every year. So because we make access to, I mean, specific, government, they don't seem to make that accessible. So when there was a time, like, all my afternoon, we had the access. We were able to like, CTID was able to

call, Joseph to be, yeah, to be this course can offer. Because of that style in. So yeah. But the problem right now, I don't know if you've also heard anything.

[Interviewer] Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't hear what you said.

[Participant 1] It's the number one user. In other words, most of this information comes from social media. So that's actually a big thing for us now. For people and the masses would, delete, I think, top influencers more than these reporters. Although I know it's, it's a trend all over the world, but especially here now. Because, I don't know if you've heard. There have been studies already that our president actually won because of TikTok. He did not, do something. He did not attend the debate, public debate. And he wasn't really, like, giving out flyers, but he was, unstable. He had a lot of influences. Actually yeah. Yeah. And, yeah, actually, it's new. And if actually you look into the acceptance, you would see that he really had a lot of influence. He paid a lot of online people.

[Interviewer] I was going to ask, if these barriers that we talked about, if they influence the topics that journalists choose to, investigate and report on, in the moment, or is, like, you push through for the barriers that introduces itself, or do you look for other stories that are easier to, to access?

[Participant 1] So live now, because this government official who's, influencer. So he's influenced, more than, tax reporters. We can't do it. We were we are obliged to that is our new. So with the fact that even with, like, government officials, he had been, like, each night to them. So they would ask and ask for a set of questions. Then but the COVID question is, the real thing that we want to add and have them add. So, yeah, it's a bit, not really beneficial, but they're not being that honest. But, you're just making weight, getting your weight.

[Interviewer] Yeah. I can I understand how that would have an impact on the stories that are chosen. And the Philippines, they've had, an intense history, to say the least, of in the past of political movements and uprisings. How would you say that investigative journalism in the Philippines has influenced social and political movements?

[Participant 1] Well, we had one president going down, Lawrence Pollan, Illinois because, of the sale end because of a report of the discrepancy with her wealth, because of an undescorted report. Also with CCIG, you were able to, a file was placed against her, and she was eventually she eventually stepped down as president. So but that was, what, a decade ago. So, there's still that essence in investigative journalism. But, unlike right now, because it's a social media thing now, I mean, our leaders are getting young, who want more instant reports, more visually, rather than going through a long-form report. So, you have, actually, the Philippines is just figuring out now how to really explain investigative reports in a younger generation. But they are still interested. But how do you capture them to get into reading that story, to see that essence? So, we're still figuring it out. But you see that interest is there. Yeah. It's hard. Especially, also, here, we're on a personality base. We're still in personality day. So if I want, a really big report, I have to get someone, a meme, to be attached with. So yeah. Like, we had, yeah, in investigative report also on, bills on rainforest bills. We were looking we went to Palau. We looked into why are they still being allowed to do roofing. And they may saw a name, Billiard. Billiard has homeowners, property, real estate, business, the husband. So twice, it's a senator, and all the environment related bills are pending on her. So that we saw that we had a name, and that was a big name. People like this. That that that was actually one of our, biggest leadership with CPLP. Because people keep me back with that. So you I mean, it's not really nice or it's not really good that you have kickbacks to name to big names. We're sorry. But for this generation, we have to look for employees, personalities, or signaling the interest.

[Interviewer] Okay. I see. So, even though it's changed the history that the Philippines has had, do you think that's influenced at all the current practices in investigative journalism even though you've changed with the times?

[Participant 1] That's a hard question. Yeah. Because, most of our, most of the editors, the yeah. The editors could be, the top people on media. You're the ones who were who was able to see the changes that happened in 1986. So with the people tower the first people power. So it is them who I mean, they're really old. They're retiring. So how would you explain ethics or dating to the younger generation? Because the old one is retiring or are no longer there. So you really have to

develop that interest again. So that actually the challenge for the Philippines. It's like this bridging that gap. How do we bridge that gap? Right. Especially, like, for my generation, the one the yeah. The middle age one, Most of us, although we know the 1986 thing, but most of us get the money. Most of my last name went out to me. Yeah. To what? Call center to, yeah, marketing because there's some money there. So there's really that gap. So how do you get that so they understand the essence of media that happened in the case of growth?

[Interviewer] That is difficult. I think I have one more question. Just given everything we've talked about the profession today and the obstacles and everything, Would you have any recommendations for policymakers or investigative journalists or groups to, protect and promote investigative journalism in the Philippines?

[Participant 1] Actually, we still go for the freedom of information there. It says a lot. I mean yeah. Not just free access, but an established access to documents, to transactions, or even to people. So once it becomes paying, what how many generations have passed, it's still there. But because like, for example, because it was an existing order past 2,000,000 ago, No longer exist right now. Actually, that's what I was also mentioning before, the freedom for information. Freedom for media, freedom for all, SMSA. It's to be a coalition of media institution, lawyer, and, yeah, advocate. Of FOI advocate. And we are still working for an freedom of Information bill.

[Interviewer] I think those are all the questions I have, and I just wanted to say thank you so much for doing this interview. It's been very insightful, and I've really gotten a lot from this.

[Participant 1] You're welcome. Bye.

Interview 2

[Participant 2] Hi.

[Interviewer] Hello. Sorry we had to reschedule and everything. Sorry for the inconvenience.

[Participant 2] Sure. No problem. No problem. Okay. I think I'm ready. We may start now.

[Interviewer] Okay. Great. So I'm just recording just for transcription purposes.

[Participant 2] Oh, no problem. Okay.

[Interviewer] Perfect. So I'm super grateful you're here. You've written lots of stories on legal issues I've seen and the government administration and everything, which is really, great for the work that I'm doing. With all that and all your former experience in mind, I just wanted to know, in general, how you perceive the current state of investigative journalism in the Philippines now, if you wouldn't mind talking about that.

[Participant 2] Yes. Actually, if you will see the full context of journalism in the Philippines, we are ranked as 1 of the most dangerous country in Asia for journalism. Most of the killings, most of the, political arrests, most of the trump upcharges are linked to, politically motivated scenarios. So the killings, trump upcharges. And it's important to consider also that libel is still considered as a criminal offense in our country. Meaning, journalists, regardless of whether what they're saying is true or not, as long as it is considered defamatory on the side of the subject of the news. Let's say, for example, government officials or private individuals who are linked to corruption of government individuals. These stories are very dangerous because these are libelous matters. Meaning, the journalists are at risk because they can be they can face, numerous, libel suits that may that may end them to jail for decades. If you know Maria Ressa, for example, she's a famous journalist in the Philippines, and she's been invited to talk all over the world for her for her, bravery and courage in continuing to fight the brand of journalism in the Philippines. She too, as big as Maria Ressa, has been facing trump up charges, numerous, libel suits, and in fact, decelerates. So just imagine the person like Maria Ressa who has the capacity to protect herself, who has the capacity to cloak herself the kind of protection because of her influence worldwide is also she too is a subject of these attacks. How much more those journalists who just who just, practice their journalism in small communities, those who serve or who work with small radios. They are the most vulnerable individuals to these kinds of attacks.

[Interviewer] And I'm curious. Have you ever faced, legal repercussions or threats because of your investigative work?

[Participant 2] Yes. Though it did not prosper, it did not reach the trial court at the okay. So in the Philippines, there is level of, prosecution, the first the primary level in filing a suit, then it must reach their trial courts, then the court of app the appellate court, then the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, at the prosecution level, it was, fortunately, it was junked. So but still, the kind of intimidation that I felt that time that I was just writing about a story of a, 1 lawmaker who has been arrested in a by bus operation for being involved in allegedly involved in drugs, an illegal drug trade. When I published that story, it took a couple of months, maybe six, before I received a notice that I was sued for such a story. And the sponsor of the suit is the incumbent mayor of that time. And fortunately, it did not prosper. But still, the idea that it may happen again and again is haunting not just me, but us. I think I was just so young at the time. In fact, I haven't been I haven't graduated that time yet. I'm still in college. I'm still in my on my internship work that time when I got to face such charges. But regardless of if the suit has prospered or not, I think the main discourse should focus on the kind of intimidation it serves, not just to me, but to my fellow young journalists that things like this can happen. Things like this can eventually shut us off or create a chilling effect that we may worry, we'd be not that free anymore on investigating things that really happen or concerns the community.

[Interviewer] And, you mentioned libel suits and those kind of threats. What are the major barriers, these included, I guess, with that influence the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in the Philippines?

[Participant 2] I think the primary barrier is the chilling effect or the or the fear to be to face suit right after writing the investigative report. There are a lot of things that that doesn't even need so much hardware. You can we can easily, like, we can easily, release a story that is truth full, that is happening in the community, that doesn't even need such hard work as hard as having investigative report in Palestine, for example. But because, major stories that concerns government officials or the people in power and the community happen not by secret, but in

grand display. So why do we need such hard work for investigative journalism? I mean, do you get what I mean? That it's these stories and the information happened in grand display. So though you as a journalist may go through, such stringent investigative process, but the gathering of information is not that quite challenging because, again, it's just on the table. It's served on a plate. But the problem is we can't just write stories, especially concerns big and powerful individuals. Because they're they have inculcated, they planted such fear to journalists that who may go after them may face trials, may face life, or may face challenges that is serious enough. Imagine if you're a small journalist, being or, yeah, a small journalist working for a small radio program or a small, media outlet. You just earn, let's say, for example, 250 a day for a regular employee with no benefits. And then suddenly as you will be sued for a liable charges plus civil charges, civil indemnities or damages. You will be asked by the court to pay over a 1, 000, 000, 000. And that that excludes, the lawyer attorney's fee and fees and charges that excludes your, pay for temporary liberty. It's huge. How could your 200 to 250 per day cover those expenses? So even if even if, legal challenges or legal suits are not as heavy as being gunned down, being tortured, or being seen to being seen just, or being thrown over a vacant plot because you're already killed. Of course, death is even more serious than legal, challenges. But these legal challenges will put you into so much burden and so much anxiety because how where would you get the funds to cover to survive these legal challenges?

[Interviewer] And that actually would directly relates to my next question because these sort of barriers, internally and externally, they do they heavily influence the topics that you choose to investigate? Or are there some stories that you, investigative journalists will shy away from because they're fearful of these, consequences?

[Participant 2] Correct. You're correct. These instances heavily influences the kind of investigative journalism that is coming out in the major media companies in the country. You won't usually see investigative journalism that focuses on major and big politicians or powerful individuals. Most likely, the investigative journalism are more on the environment, which does not directly target specific individuals. Most likely, it's more on gender, investigative journalism more on women, but there are only few investigative journalism that really focuses on why such individual suddenly acquire so much wealth, Why such individual has been mentioned by many

arrested or, yeah, arrested, individuals to be their boss. Why such in why such powerful politicians has been tagged to be terrorists or to be, drug lords or landlords. It's just so few stories. And those stories, those journalists who wrote their stories did not slip at night very well. Because right after those stories has been released or even those stories are still in the process and has not been released but has been leaked, those journalists did not sleep at night very well.

[Interviewer] And when you're covering these types of stories, what kind of, challenges do you encounter when you're trying to get information from, say, government sources, or official sources?

[Participant 2] This is not just my experience, but this is the common experience of all. When you go to big politicians, ask for their side. Right after that, you will go home being tailed by an unknown individual in a motorcycle or in a vehicle that was trying to arrest. Things you can see in the movies are happening in real life in the Philippines. You will be receiving text messages and calls threatening you. A lot a lot of our colleagues, of course, because of some of my colleagues really worked in the industry for years now. They're already veterans, so they're used to these kinds of threats and attacks. So the maybe the powerful individual sense that they cannot be easily swayed by mere threats, they also counter published that these individuals or these journalists who write these brief stories are members of terrorist groups or terrorist organizations. We call it in the Philippines as red tagging. I mean, you you'll be tagged to be anti government. That's how they dismiss your story that, oh, that's why, this journalist was able to write this story because he or she is anti-governed. So, it will seemingly say that these are just makeup stories. So the intimidation is even more growing because, the community or the populace that you wanted to inform with the kind of stories that is also having their second thoughts that, oh, you're a dangerous individual. You are a member of a terrorist organization. You are anti-government. Things like that.

[Interviewer] And in light of all this, has your perspective on investigative journalism evolved from when you started to now?

[Participant 2] Yes. These strategies are even more safer on our side because veteran journalists

and our editors would all would always tell us that no story is worth a life. So we strategize each story that it will be safe for us against suits. We strategize each story that it would it won't put us to so much harm, so we may, put each story to a series, for example, that that in some way, we tone it down to not to not appear as it is a hard story. So in in reality, if you will see it in in in a bird's eye view, it only shows that somehow we are we are strategizing or forming up our story in a way that it pleases or in a way that it won't hurt the individual that has been subject for investigative stories. Alright? And somehow, these are the effect of chilling effects or the threats or the intimidation that they are giving because we could we could actually and we need to actually write these hard stories straightforward without even toning down the theme of the story. Because the truth is these stories are hard stories. But because of the fear that writers has been facing, they tone down the story so that it won't directly onion skin the subject of the story or it won't butt for the subject of the story.

[Interviewer] And, this investigative journalism and disclosure around it, how do you think this impacts because I know the Philippines is considered, a democracy or a transitional democracy. How would you how would you say that it impacts the country's status of a democracy?

[Participant 2] Yeah. You're correct. The Philippines is already a democratic country. So from being able and being under martial law or being under the dictatorship of the former of the of the father of our current president now. So the father of our current president now. So the father of our current president is like the Hitler in the Philippines. He is a dictator. He is Ferdinand Marcos senior, if you if you want to look him up. There are a lot of journalism stories that happened during his time, the martial law of the Philippines. So right after the martial law, we transition to a democratic country. So that's why they call it as transitional democracy. But after that, we are already, by reality, a democratic country. Republican democratic republican country. Okay. So it's so sad that in a Democratic country, we still have laws that are that can easily be manipulated to attack journalists. These are, for example, libel is still considered as a criminal offense. In America, where we pattern our constitution, they no longer consider libel as a criminal offense. They just consider it as a civil offense. Right? And in a democratic country like the Philippines, we don't have policies that directly protect the democracy. For example, 1, main highlight of our constitution is the protection of the freedom of ex of speech and expression. But

this is only guaranteed if the violator are the legislators. But this does not guarantee protection when the violators are executive officials or members of the body of the government that is tasked to execute laws. Police, for example. We do not have laws that directly protect, journalists from state sponsored violence. So even if we are in a democracy, it has been a continuous struggle and it has been a continuous, criticism against our state and government that there is no enough protection that the journalists have enjoyed. And not just only journalists, but every single resident or individual who is living in the country.

[Interviewer] I see. And, with this kind of culture of fear and, in such a, I would say, like, such a politically charged environment in the Philippines oftentimes. How do investigative journalists then maintain independence but also credibility with their audiences? If you will, okay, we will divide the context into 2. Journalists who are working in small communities, working with small media organization and journalists who are working nationwide with big media organizations. Let's start first with those who work with big media organizations. They are the most protected. They have group of lawyers and attorneys who can defend them in court. They have the major influence all over the world, meaning the world can look over them. So although there's a sense of fear, but the kind of confidence that that they embody is much stronger, meaning they can do their work because they have enough protection to receive. When we go to journalists who work with small organizations, who barely earn a hundred or two, they have the most fear to carry. Their confidence is less because they are more focused on I'd rather be safe and leave the next day than risk my life over a kind of storm.

[Interviewer] Right. Right. And does this kind of fear, does it greatly impact the ethical, I guess, perspectives of journalists in their work, or compromise it?

[Participant 2] Yes. This kind of fear somewhat on different levels compromises a story. Because just what I've already told you, we are forced to strategize our story to not hurt the subject of the story to event to eventually tone down the story. As to the ethics, I think it's not against our ethical beliefs of somewhat gatekeeping a story because it's between a story or your life. So the ethical burden is justified when you choose your life over publishing a story. But as to the as to the credibility or as to the as to the bravery of the story, somewhat, it has been compromised. But

there are other brave journalists who do not really compromise. Yeah. But there are only a few of them.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And the Philippines has had, I know they've had an intense history in, the past of political movements and uprisings. And how would you say investigative journalism in the Philippines has influenced these sort of movements?

[Participant 2] We will start with the time when the Philippines was under martial law, under a major dictatorship, under a tyranny. During the tyrannical days in the Philippines that has been ruled by a dictator, Ferdinand Marcos senior, there are already this organization called Mosquito Journalism. There are the journalists who despite the despite the attacks that during that time, the government said, oh, there are no journalists allowed to publish any stories because we are under martial law. Everything that transpired in the community must be approved by the government. Anything you say must be approved by the government because we are under major dictatorship. We're under tyranny. We're no longer under democracy. So but journalists that time still, organized themselves to create a mosquito journal mosquito journalism. Mosquito journalism because they just hide in the dark, but they are noisy. Like a journalism who just fly like I mean, mosquito who just fly over your ears. But you can't see them because they're hiding in the dark. So those stories that has been secretly, released in small communities eventually caused the uprising or, in fact, contributed the ousting of the first country's major dictator that has been known worldwide. Though it's shocking that after, the major and dreadful days in the country, In 2022, the Philippines re-elected his son, the son of the dictator. It's kinda shocking, but, yeah, that's the trend in the Philippines. That's how fake news helped them, helped them gain a seat back in power. So when this journalism, even if there are silence, even if they're limited by the government or by the people in power, they still were able to work it out to have an influence in the community and cause the ousting of the major dictator. But that does it that does not end during the time of the martial law. So it was really the uprising and journalism. I would say that uprising that includes journalism because the first step of the people power revolution started when the people when few individuals decided to voice out, when decided to inform the public what is really happening in the country and why they're being locked down in their and being limited in their in their households. So it really started there, and then eventually, it rose to a big

uprising that resulted in the ousting of the former dictator. And then we transitioned to democracy. So it was the uprising, the people power, EDSA People Power Revolution. It's called EDSA People Power because the major uprising happened in February in EDSA. It's EDSA is the street in the Philippines where the people come out from their household and walked march over the EDSA. It's the only bloodless revolution in the country. It's a revolution, but on that day, on February of that day, no blood has shattered over the streets. But before that day, of course, we are under major dictatorship and tyranny. There are a lot of bloods, torture, and major events that the international community called it as war crimes against humanity. So before that, after that, we transitioned to democracy problem. But that does not end there. Administration right after the former dictator has also paved the way. The journalism, the investigative journalism, that exposes the corruption of the administration has also paved the way to the uprising and the ousting of the of administration. Okay? So there is this EDSA 2 revolution, which is also a bloodlust revolution that ousted the second president. Yeah. That that paved the way to the ousting of the president in the Philippines. That's the second ousting. And so that's how journalism really gives, that's how Philippines gives so much importance to journalism because it allows or it started, a discourse and a discussion over communities, and eventually, it resulted to mass participation, or it organizes individuals to participate in governance and in politics. And it resulted to ousting of different corrupt politicians. It resulted to an election that paved the way for government officials to be accountable. For example, even if our current president now is the son of the former dictator, because of the kind of journalism that we have, we have exposed so much political and economic stories happening in the country. Just recently, we exposed that we have a Chinese national who, I think, who falsified all her documents and be elected as a mayor in in 1 of the cities in the country. And she is part of the alleged individuals responsible for the Pogo operations. No. It's the Chinese controlled, Pogo companies. You can't look over that. So that's this is how big journalism's role is. We were able to expose and put those people in power to account.

[Interviewer] That's really big. I have just one more question for you. Just given all the obstacles to the profession that we talked about today, what would what recommendations would you offer to policymakers or media organizations, to promote and protect investigative journalism in the Philippines?

[Participant 2] I would say to individual journalists: join a union so that you will be organized, and you'll be part of an organization that would help you protect and help you give insights on how to protect yourselves. So join union. That's for the journalists. For the government, impose policies that will protect the genuine freedom of speech, decriminalize libel, and create policies that will give assistance to journalists who are facing trump up charges. Make the legal remedies available and accessible for all journalists. For the union, expand more your reach because we have the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines or the NUJP, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines. Expand more your reach, reach more individuals who are in in the far-flung areas, who are in the outskirts of the country.

[Interviewer] That's a really good recommendation. Thank you so much. That's all the questions I have for you, but I just wanted to thank you again. I'm very grateful for you, giving your time and your wisdom to me, really. So I just wanted to thank you very much.

[Participant 2] Thank you. Have a great day.

Interview 3

[Participant 3] Hi.

[Interviewer] Hi. Thank you so much for joining the meeting.

[Participant 3] No worries. Thank you Thank you so much for reaching out.

[Interviewer] Yeah. It's really generous of you to do this, so thank you. I'm just going to record the meeting just for transcription purposes. Thank you. So, yeah, it's just, I'm really grateful to have you here because I saw that you you've written stories on legal issues and the government a lot of, investigative work. So, that that's really useful to what I'll be writing in my thesis. And just with that and all your former experience in mind, just how do you perceive the current state of investigative journalism in the Philippines in your experience?

[Participant 3] Oh, it's that's a really good question because, I think I'm just going to do, like, a comparison between the administration and the Marcos administration because, I kind of formally entered the industry, in between those 2, like, right fresh after the elections. So back when I did, investigative work, during the Duterte administration, byline since I was still in school, but I was, like, helping out, other, full-time journalists do their investigative work. You could really feel the, deterioration of the state of press freedom in the country because government agencies were just less willing to talk to you about, these kinds of issues, especially, the terrorist drug war. The government also launched, like, a freedom of information kind of platform, during the Turkish term as well. I don't remember the year, but, that's they did that. But, even if you put in, like, formal requests and stuff like that, they don't get back to you. I felt that part of it was really just an attempt to keep some specific stories down, especially those that were related to drug wars, the human rights abuses that were happening during the Duterte administration. And that kind of, I guess, blockade of information, it kind of intensified during the pandemic as well because everything was online. So, the journalists weren't able to go around and, you know, just find these stories naturally as, often as they used to. So, they've grown to become a bit more reliant on state sources, official sources. But, these official sources, they don't tell you everything that they want you to know. So that's 1 thing. Freedom of information was more difficult. And I think second, it's also, just reaching out to these vulnerable communities, the victims, survivors, depending on the situation, it's it was way more difficult, especially during the pandemic, because, a lot of these communities, a lot of these, victims of human rights abuses, for example, since those are the stories that I often, wrote about. You know, these are marginalized communities who, don't have a lot of access to stable Internet, good Internet, and the best way to really, get to know them and, you know, know their stories, the visit them personally in their homes, and just get to know them and their families, follow them around, see what it's like. But it hasn't, that really went down during the pandemic. And it was only after, things started to open up that we're kind of able to do these a bit more again. In terms of the freedom of information things, it did open up a bit after the Marcos administration, but, not as much, if that makes sense. Like, it wasn't much progress, like, especially when it comes to stories that are related to human rights abuses during, the dictatorship of president Marco's father. The institutions that, memorialize martial law, the happenings of martial law are still there, but, you

can say that they have kind of weakened, especially, the presidential commission for good governance, which is responsible with, retaking the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcos family. The person who runs it now is appointed by the dictator's son. So it just makes things, a bit more difficult to, maybe, number 1, keep those, keep the Duterte administration, stories, going. You know, just keep putting them out there because there's still a lot of them, that haven't been told. And number 2, just keeping that memory of martial law and the Marcos dictatorship, alive as much as possible as well. It's become quite difficult. I think, overall, Marco's administration, they did they are nicer to the press, but the there's still this wall, that keeps us from getting information that we need.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And I'm curious. Have you when you were writing these stories, have you ever faced, like, legal consequences or threats, because of the investigative work that you've done, both from either from government, officials or just the public?

[Participant 3] I wouldn't say it's legal. It didn't reach, legal dispute levels, but, the PDIA, which is the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency here in the Philippines, they're kind of sensitive to the numbers that you publish regarding the drug war. So, we did run some stories of, families of the drug war victims, some of these, are, like, minors below, 18. The youngest that the family of the youngest victim that I got the, interview was around 13, 15, around that age. And, when we published, what we usually do in, Philippine journalism is because the day is very sensitive about these numbers. We kind of just publish both sides. So, publish the idea numbers, the official idea numbers, which is at around 6, 7,000 by the end of the, the Duterte administration. They kind of stopped or slowed down counting since the Marcos, since Marcos took office. But then there's also this, figure from TAJAS, which is an NGO, based in the University of the Philippines who, keeps track of these killings that were not included in official numbers. So, they peg the number to be at around 16,000 to 20,000. Yeah. It's a huge disparity. And, oftentimes, we, I would say, left leaning, publications, they often run with the DAHAS numbers because, the PDIA numbers are quite dubious, and they are aware that the government has been trying to downplay the scale of the drug war for a long time. But, yeah, we did get, emails, texts from, PDIA officials telling, trying to dispute the numbers. So no. Yeah. So, you know, it's just that just that small, thing about just that small thing, just figures. Was already really sensitive to them. This isn't super

unearned, but when I was, working as working for a specific, investigative journalist, I was translating some stuff from her from, Cebuano because, the story was about, the drug war in Cebu. And during that course of the assignment, I think it was, like, days before the story was published, I was getting, like, weird calls as well. They would not introduce themselves. They would just stay silent, make noises, and this was, like, late at night. So, you know, if you're, like, a college student and you just started working on these kinds of stories and you kinda get these kinds of calls, like, it does make you worry as well. So yeah. Those were the two incidents that come to mind. Often, when I work on these stories, we do always try to get the side of the government or, you know, whatever big power is involved in the story. And, you know, a nonresponse is a response, and we run it that way. And, you know, that's they don't seem to usually, they don't seem to have a problem with it. Right. Yeah.

[Interviewer] I imagine that's a lot of pressure. Yeah. Because I was wondering about the barriers that you mentioned, like information access and source relations and all that, if that influences the topics that you choose to investigate or not to investigate. Like, does it push you to do, to write certain stories or avoid certain stories, depending on which how much, obstacles you have in front of you to get there?

[Participant 3] Yeah. I guess I would say that it has kind of influenced the way that, the stories that I pursued because, when I worked, my first full time journalism job with VERIFILES, We are a nonprofit, so, admittedly, we don't have all the resources that we necessarily need to do these, full blown investigative, although the editors do, promote it and try to support, the work as much as, they physically can. But I guess that's also kind of the reason why my work has leaned towards drug war abuses, ICC investigations, stuff like that, because those were, sources that were, quite accessible to me. We did have good access to legal counsel of these, families. So, they were more comfortable to, speak with us. Our editors are also were they were, like, veteran journalists who have been here for, like, decades, so they were also able to connect us to really, high profile or maybe former high profile officials who could corroborate, the things that the information that we were able to, find because, you know, as much as, investigative journalism is really important in this especially at the state of press freedom in the country, The newsrooms here are kind of spread thin when it comes to finances and, resources and stuff like that. So, what

we often do is we kinda just start with what's within reach. And then from there, we try to see if we can, like, stretch that web any further.

[Interviewer] Yeah. Because, it's interesting to me because I know that investigative journalism plays a big role in promoting transparency and accountability in, say, government figures or administrations or what have you. But, what about the reverse of it, like, with governmental restrictions? I know that transparency is important in journalism as a whole. But how would that affect transparency in, investigative journalism work, with all those barriers in mind?

[Participant 3] I guess, if you're a persistent investigative journalist because, some of us are persistent, some of us kind of end up parking some stories for a bit, because some of the data that we ask for, some of the information that we ask for, they are crucial. I mean, we wouldn't be asking, for that kind of information if it wasn't essential to the story. And sometimes, like, it's so essential that, you just can't run the story without it. So, fortunately, some stories, some really good investigative ideas, they do get, parked or, like, set aside for a bit, because of that restriction. I personally haven't had any part before because of the restrictions because, my editor is kinda guide me through working around that. In a way that's still balanced, but at the same time, like, you know, it still tells it puts the issue out there and it tells the Filipinos, like, what this is all about and why it's important to them. So, I do acknowledge that, yeah, the restrictions have affected the reporting a bit. Some stories get parked, and it doesn't help that doesn't help that, investigative reporters in the Philippines. It's, kinda not like other countries. I think some countries have, like, reporters who do solely investigative work, while others do the breaking news, the daily grind, and all of that. But here in the Philippines, like, the industry is kinda spread thin. So, like, investigative work is more of a side project for, like, reporters who do that daily grind. So, you know, it's just time constraints as well and the restrictions. It just kinda forces these stories to be set aside.

[Interviewer] Yeah. That makes sense. And like you said, with the industry being pretty spread thin and the Philippines is quite a politically charged environment, like, historically, at least, With that, like, how as a journalist has it been to maintain, the independence and credibility with the with your audience in such a charged politically charged environment?

[Participant 3] Oh, that's a really good question because I think that's, especially now that we're about to end an election year, people are gonna be their candidates this October. So it's starting to get really politically charged here. Supercharged. But, I think it's something that it's a balancing act that, you know, journalists are trying to, still figure out because, like I mentioned, the Marcos administration, they have kind of tried to exude this openness, towards the press and promoting the free press and free expression and transparency and all of that, but they are quite sensitive. Like, there have been several, ballast reporters who, have been straight up snubbed when they tried to ask questions. And, you know, in the Duterte administration, one of, our fellow reporters, Pia Renada, she did get banned from the presidential palace just because she was asking these, like, really hard hitting questions about, the Duterte administration's activities. So, it is a balancing act because on one hand, you want to provide news that is, of course, balanced, that is accurate, that is able to, you know, help Filipinos make these informed decisions amid this, like, super, politically charged environment. But, at the same time, journalists here do face that problem of, again, it all goes back to access because they aren't able to ask something that's a little too sensitive sometimes for some officials. They get their access cut off, and that's even more difficult. I heard that, Pia Renada, the reporter who got, banned from the presidential palace, she ended up having to kind of pass on her questions to some of her colleagues because she would only have to watch she could only watch the press briefings through the official livestream of the presidential palace. So, oh, she had to pass them on or else she couldn't ask the questions that she needed to ask. Wow. So, yeah, I think that's that was that's really their ultimate weapon, blocking access to it. And, I guess, part of it is that balancing act, but also, like, hopefully, helping officials and the public in general just better understand why journalists do what we do. Because I think here in the Philippines, especially during the Duterte administration, there really was a lot of bad mouthing of the press and a lot of, you know, discrediting of us and saying that, you know, we're biased or, you know, we're being paid by a certain oligarch or something like that. It's not something that's particular to the Philippines itself. Like, I know that another a lot of other countries and democracies experience this. But I guess that ordinary Filipinos who may not be as, aware of what journalists do and why they ask these questions, they kinda they kinda just ate it up. They just kinda took it in. Kinda believe that we ask these, like, difficult questions because just because we wanna, like, go against them or

want we wanna paint the, officials or the government or, you know, anyone in power really in a bad light. Right. And so I guess there's a lot of, like, I guess there's a lot of undoing of that, you know, just really bringing back that trust in the press. 1, helping, officials, the community understand why we do what we do. And, yeah, just number 3, just I guess that's what the second thing would lead to is really just improving that access and understanding that, you know, we're not an enemy. We just wanna help the public understand why you guys are doing what you're doing. And, you know, I guess if you can't really answer that, that says a lot more about you than you for us.

[Interviewer] And the badmouthing of the press was mainly done by government, officials or the public?

[Participant 3] Oh, it was it was, during the Duterte administration, it was really concerted effort. Like, it was Duterte himself who was saying things. He was calling my editor back in VERIFILES. He called her, a prostitute. It was kind of vulgar things. He even included, I'm sure you know the story of Maria Ressa, but my edit my editor in chief, Ellen Tordesillas, she was also involved in that. And he kinda tried to, pin her into this, conspiracy, plot that was trying to oust him or whatever. Like, it was crazy. So concerted effort between government, but there was also, like, very, like, pro administration vloggers who were, like, just trying to, discredit, the press in general, especially, these established mainstream, reporters who are really been doing this job, like, for decades already. So a lot of them, they kinda, I guess, lost their credibility. Not in the sense that not in, you know, the regular sense, but, you know, they kinda lost it in the eyes of the public because of, that kind of bad mouthing. And, you know, that's it's just I guess we're all just still trying to recover from that even though, Marcos, he's especially I guess, they're trying to take advantage of the more open, attitude towards Marcos, but I feel like he could he could still do more to improve the state of press freedom in the country.

[Interviewer] And I've seen that you've worked with multiple media formats, to deliver the news. Have you seen a difference in how in 1, how it's received by the audience and also, maybe challenges to get the story out or in anything depending on the format that you've chosen? Yeah.

[Participant 3] So I do work I dabble in a lot of the formats. I feel like every format you think of for journalism, I kinda double dot it. So right now, I'm working in TV journalism, which is exciting. And it is also really interesting to see the difference in how the public perceives my work as a TV journalist compared to, like, my work as an online journalist because my last job was, in online journalism. I guess in TV, there's still this higher level of trust, I guess. Because, whenever after I'm done with the show and stuff like that, I do, like, kinda check the comments online to see, like, how they received, those certain items. And you could still see that trust, definitely, especially in TV Journalism, because I work in ABS CBN, which was shut down by the Duterte administration in 2020. So they kind we kinda had to, like, have other networks carry our stuff and at the same time, like, kinda try to pivot online. But I could still see that, there is still some good reception. Like, they do still perceive us as a reliable source compared to, I guess, online maybe because, there are so many outlets or quote, unquote impostors trying to break into the journalism circle using, online platforms. I guess there's, less trust there as well, especially if you're just, a startup, a nonprofit who's just, like, trying to get your work out there and get your feet up. It is there is significantly less trust, but, it does help when, it does help when the people who run it, your editors, your management, it does help when they're, like, veteran journalists in those ranks. But, to an ordinary Filipino, like, you know, I guess some of it some of them just see it as, like, just another website that they need to, like, verify or maybe if your online news outlet was subject to, attacks from those bloggers, the people in power. They kinda just see you as this biased blog or blogs sometimes.

So, yeah, I guess there's definitely more doubt towards, like, newer media. I think if you check the Reuters, the Reuters Institute, digital, Sorry. The name kinda slips my mind. But Yeah. Yeah. There was a recent Reuters report, and they kinda also ranked the trust ratings of each mainstream news outlet here in the Philippines. And you can see that, the the more traditional, outlets or at least the ones that have started, as a newspaper, stuff like that, they do still rank kind of higher. It's usually radio and TV that rank higher in terms of trustworthiness for these for Filipinos compared to, like, purely online outlets that kinda started, like, really as online as a website. They are they have been I did notice that they did rank quite low. So, yeah, I guess that kinda sums it up. Like, there's still that trust in traditional media. Even though it's eroded a lot over the years. So that's good. But, I did wish that these independent online outlets also kinda got

a boost of got that boost of trust from the public as well because, I guess online is a bit more volatile in terms of readership because you could just pick whatever you wanna read and whatever you wanna see.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And these independent media outlets and also mainstream. How would you say in the in the Philippines in particular, it's influenced social and major social and political movements, in the country?

[Participant 3] I guess that's interesting because it's usually these, based on my experience working with both, it's usually the online outlets who, are more into pursuing investigative work mainly because, I guess there's less pressure, I feel, with these online outlets to, like, stick to a specific story in a specific angle, and there's more encouragement to, like, you know, see what's out there. Maybe you'll be able to find these groundbreaking stories. So, I guess in a way that traditional media and, you know, these online, outlets, they do kind of have this symbiotic relationship in a way in the sense that, when these online outlets kind of put up an investigative story, usually, traditional media will also kind of try to corroborate or verify these. And then from there, if they find that it's credible, they can run it, you know, on their own as well. They also kinda run it. So it kinda helps amplify the investigative of these, smaller, online, outlets as well. But at the same time, these traditional these traditional, outlets, they do kind of put up investigative or, like, it's more branded as exclusives every now and then. Maybe once in a blue moon, the reporters have enough time, enough leads, enough resources to put up, put out a story, an investigative story really quick. I guess the most recent example of that was, an ABS CBN reporter. His name is Niko Bawa. He was able to release this series of stories about, this alleged cult in the southern Philippines, which was, using which was under which was using land that was protected and under, through an agreement with the DNR, and it turns out that they were, there was child labor, there was human trafficking, sex trafficking that was going on in those, in that group. I don't wanna call it a cult, but, yeah, that that is how I was framed in. You know, from that, I guess, 2 days of reporting from Nico, and he even went to, the group's compound, by the 3rd day. Other news outlets, including the ones online, started picking up and started pursuing their own stories about that particular group. And from there, they were able to find even more, you know, human rights violations that that committed or even, like, legal violations,

over their permit to operate with the environment department. So it's really symbiotic in that way that they really, at least traditional and online, they try to build off of each other's stories and expand it, to be able to really just give us a wide picture as much wide of a picture of that, issue as possible.

[Interviewer] And then I have just one more question. Just given everything we talked about, all the obstacles to the profession, what recommendations would you offer to policymakers or media organizations or investigative journalists in general, to promote and protect investigative journalism in the Philippines?

[Participant 3] I think the core of it all is really people just aren't aware of, like, what we do and why we do the things that we do. So I think, like, it really boils down to the education that, like, the young like, as early as kinder or maybe, like, 1st grade. Basic media literacy, it was introduced, in the senior high school curriculum at grades 11 to 12, but I think we can still go, much younger. Just really introducing that, idea of, you know, just really promoting these fundamentals of, like, truth, why it's important to be telling it, why it's important to be believing in it and verifying what you know. Because once I feel like once Filipinos have these basic skills and maybe from there, they can be thought about, you know, new sorry, news, journalism, and know what the role of journalism is in society. And I guess once that's taught in these schools at, like, younger ages, you're able you're able to have a better they kinda grow up with this idea of what we do, why it's important, and, you know, how we're not just, like, playing enemy with, the government and stuff like that. So it starts younger, and it has to start younger because, here in the Philippines, these, sometimes kids drop out right after 6th grade. So you really have to catch them while they're kinda still at school, if that makes sense. Yeah. So, yeah, it's just it's really, early media literacy classes. And number two, really improving that freedom of information. And I guess they can also start, since, money is also an important aspect of investigative journalism. I think one thing they could also do is lift the Duterte administration's restrictions on accessing the statements of assets, liabilities, and net worth of public officials. Like, you kind of have the have the consent of that official to be able to access that when, it wasn't that case, before and that's what made it difficult to, access Duterte's cell ends. And that was commonly how investigative journalists got to, uncover, corruption, draft, and all of that. So, really bringing back

that access and, you know, just bringing back access in general. Information about these human rights abuses is really important as well, because you can't say you have a free press if you're keeping the press from accessing information that they need. So I guess it all boils down to those two main things. Really, one, education, de vilifying the press and what we do, and improving that access so we're able to have these stories. And, you know, these stories, they do spark discourse about how we're running things and what we should be doing. And from there, I guess, you know, we're able to restore that freedom of the press here.

[Interviewer] Yeah. Thank you. So those are all the questions I have for you today, but I just wanted to thank you again for taking the time to do this. I'm very grateful.

[Participant 3] Thank you so much for, you know, reaching out. It was it was really nice talking to you.

[Interviewer] I learned so much. So thank you.

[Participant 3] I do hope you come you come here soon.

[Interviewer] Yeah. That'd be great.

[Participant 3] Yeah. So much. Thank you, and good luck. Good luck with your thesis. Excited for you.

[Interviewer] Thank you. Bye. Have a great day.

Interview 4

[Interviewer] Hello? Hi, I'm sorry. I can't hear you. Hello?

[Participant 1] Hi. Hi. Can you hear me? Yes. Okay.

[Interviewer] Hi. Sorry. I couldn't hear you for a second. Thank you so much for doing this. I know I know you're very busy, so I really appreciate it.

[Participant 1] Yes. Thank you too. Thank you for, thinking of us. Yeah. Sure.

[Interviewer] So I'm just going to record this just for transcription purposes for the data. And everything will be anonymous, so you don't have to worry about that. Yeah. So, yeah, I would just, would like to begin with talking about how long you've worked as a journalist and in what sections and just a little bit about your past in journalism?

[Participant 1] Alright. For, I've been a journalist for the past 16 years, and, I have been with Rappler for the past 12 years. I have covered, religion. I have covered foreign affairs, and I've covered the election system. Yeah. And I started in a television production company, and I moved online in 2011, 2012. And now I'm doing, multimedia work for Rappler. Aside from that, I am also teaching at the University of Santo Tomas part time. I teach journalism.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. Wow. It's amazing. So you've had a lot of experience. Like, you've worked many years. Given this, has your perspective, on the state of journalism evolved over your career since you've begun to now, Sorry. Since you've worked in journalism for a long time, I was wondering, has your perspective on the state of, investigative journalism, for example, Has it evolved since you, started your career to now?

[Participant 4] Well, I think it has evolved in in such a way that, well, there is less funding for things like this. And as a but aside from that, whenever it is done, it is done in a multimedia fashion in a in a multimedia fashion.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. And when you're covering these, heavy investigative stories, for example, I was reading that you covered typhoon and you produced many investigative reports. Yeah. When you're covering these, have you ever faced, especially, I guess, when on your coverage of the election, court charges or any legal constraints for these stories that you've covered?

[Participant 4] Not really. Not for me specifically, but for my colleagues.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. Were these the colleagues that helped you cover these stories, or was it were they different stories?

[Participant 4] Other stories. Yeah. Not for me specifically. Yeah.

[Interviewer] So if not, legal charges, have you ever faced any, sort of threats due to your investigative work?

[Participant 4] Not me. Not me specifically. My colleagues.

[Interviewer] Yeah. Okay. And, what kind of, challenges do you encounter, if any, when seeking information, for example, from government sources, when you cover stories such as the election or involving government officials?

[Participant 4] In general, there's a lack of transparency in government processes in the Philippines. Aside from that, the bureaucracy is very, complicated. There's a lot of paperwork involved. There's a lot of red tape involved, so we have to, face those hurdles. Many government offices are also doing things manually, not electronically. So it's harder because you you'll have to go there for simple pieces of paper, unlike in the United States, for example, where, you can access things online.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And you have, I was reading up on you have for, information access. You have, an online portal, right, that you can submit requests to? And do you often use this, for sources that you need from the government for your stories?

[Participant 4] The online portal of the government, you mean?

[Interviewer] Mhmm. Yeah.

[Participant 4] Well yeah. But it's, it's not a central part of the government processes. So it's kinda complicated to use it sometimes or sometimes it's so slow.

[Interviewer] And when you are covering these stories that that you've done whether it's, in Rappler or your former organizations. Did you feel, the support of your editors or the board of administration, when you're covering more complicated stories?

[Participant 4] Of course. Of course. In terms of budget, in terms of editorial guidance, yes.

[Interviewer] Okay. And regarding the different newsrooms that you've worked with, did you feel, like, a different experience of support, depending on which news outlet you worked for?

[Participant 4] Well, yeah, there are differences, but, in general, there is, a general kind of support.

[Interviewer] Okay. And then I wanted to ask you about your thoughts on the relationship between investigative journalism and the country's, democratic status? Because I know the Philippines is considered a democracy, and I just wanted to get your thoughts on how big of a role investigative journalism plays in that.

[Participant 4] A democracy is more robust. It's more stable if journalists are able to look into the processes and question the processes and investigate the processes. So I think there is a correlation between a healthy practice of investigative journalism and a healthy democracy.

[Interviewer] I would agree. And do you see kind of a difference of, support globally for the Philippines with or, compared to support within the Philippines for journalism?

[Participant 4] I know there are some coalitions, I don't have data on that, so it would be difficult for me to answer that question. Yeah. No.

[Interviewer] That makes sense. And I know that with these stories that you that you do, you're trying to ensure proper accountability of the government and officials. What then have you experienced are some systems of accountability for journalists like yourself, when you're covering these stories?

[Participant 4] Just on the flip side of, being held accountable for Where number 1, there are, people who would file a case in court if your report is, libelous, if it is malicious. Aside from that, there are breeders who will give you all kinds of feedback. Some feedback, some forms of feedback are, can be can be harsh. Some can be mild. It depends. So but there is that system of feedback with the readers. So, yeah, it keeps us on our toes. Right.

[Interviewer] And I'm just curious on for Rappler, is it an open, like, do you have open forums for your readers to give you feedback?

[Participant 4] Our email is available, online. Oh, okay.

[Interviewer] Okay. And so given all the stories that you've covered, can you share maybe a particularly challenging investigative story that was memorable to you that you've done in the past?

[Participant 4] Well, the story on the citizenship of former foreign secretary Perfecto Yacai, It was you can search it. It's, online, and it was difficult because there were no it involves it involved the US passport of the foreign secretary, and it was difficult to counter check the number because of the passport number, because of the privacy laws. But, thankfully, we had sources who provided us with certain information, and so our story was able to stand.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. Wow. And I know it's difficult to cover governmental matters and official matters as such. And how do you personally maintain independence and credibility with your audience when you're if it's, in a politically charged environment, for example?

[Participant 4] Like attribution, like, attribution, like, sticking to the facts, being respectful in

terms of demeanor. I think it would be it would not be very, difficult to gain the respect of the audience and to keep yourself, independent in their eyes.

[Interviewer] And speaking of public trust and history, what is your how has the stories that you're that you've covered or, other investigative journalists for that matter, influenced the social and political movements, I guess, of the Philippines?

[Participant 4] Sorry. Can you repeat?

[Interviewer] Just how has investigative journalism that you've done or your colleagues, in the Philippines influenced the social and political movements, in the Philippines? Any in that can come to mind?

[Participant 4] Well, there have been reports. I can't think of specific examples now, but, certainly, when media when the media would report on something, the government many instances, the government would react by, solving that problem, especially on the local level on the local level. In terms of local governments, yes, they tend to react by fixing the problem. So I think it works in that manner.

[Interviewer] Mhmm. And, this history that the Philippines has experienced with, the revolutions and all that, how do you feel it's, influenced current practices in investigative journalism?

[Participant 4] Yeah. I mean, because there's a robust tradition of, of journalism in the Philippines. The many of our democracy fighters in the past were journalists, especially during the Marcos dictatorship. The press stood up for the rights of common Filipinos, and that continues to influence, many journalists today. We continue to look up to the heroes, of journalism, especially in the Marcos dictatorship. So, yeah, they continue to be an inspiration. They continue to shape how journalism is done, in the Philippines today.

[Interviewer] And I just wanted to ask you. I'm curious the major barriers that you've, seen towards investigative journalism. How have they influenced the well, not only the quantity, but

also the quality of investigative reporting in the Philippines?

[Participant 4] What do you mean?

[Interviewer] What whatever major barriers that, the Filipino journalists face, whether that be governmental or, intimidation or from the public, pressure from the public. How have these influenced, from what you've seen, the quality or and quantity of investigative reporting, if at all?

[Participant 4] I'm not sure if it really affects the quality or quantity in a substantial way because it is a normal fact of life, of a journalist. I mean, how people react to your stories or how people treat your stories whether positively or negatively, I think it's, it's key. It's, I mean, it's a fact of life already, and I don't think there is a noticeable, substantial, effect. That can be unique to, investigative journalism.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. I see. And then of all the sections that you've worked on since you've worked on religion, foreign affairs, which one would you say you've had the most, I suppose, not difficulty, but challenges with your sources or putting it out to the public in the reception that it's had?

[Participant 4] Well, I think, we're all the same. I mean, journalism, no matter what the topic is, you would encounter similar hurdles and similar reactions because it's journalism. What changes is the topic. But the dynamics of, you know, facing, institutions or, looking for accountability or do research, it's the same across the board. So I can't think of you know, I can say that this one is more difficult. This one is easier because, yeah, journalism is journalism. The topic is whatever the topic is.

[Interviewer] And, with, Philippine media, have you experienced, or how have you navigated some ethical challenges when you're writing your stories? Were there any, major ethical challenges as a journalist that you've had to deal with in order to pursue a story or anything like that? Well, yeah.

[Participant 4] I mean, it really depends, which story. But, yeah, ethical challenges come and go. It's really part of the course. So it depends on the story. But the answer is yes. The answer is yes. I do encounter ethical challenges, but I'm not, I mean, it depends per story, and how you resolve it is, on a case by case basis. Right.

[Interviewer] And, does the access to the sources or, the difficulty of the story, does this heavily influence the topics that you choose to investigate and report on or put aside, for example, if you know that it's going to be difficult to get information, from for what you need?

[Participant 4] Not really. I mean, it's, it's part of the part of the function. So, yeah, it's the same per story.

[Interviewer] And for you personally, what motivates you to continue your investigative journalism work, I suppose, in this day and age?

[Participant 4] Well, number 1, because, I think my personal temperament is, I love uncovering things and looking for things that people don't know about. But on a deeper level, I think because people need it, people need, journalists who will look for the information, will investigate for, the benefit of the public, investigate with a purpose and with a clear view of the public interest, the public agenda.

[Interviewer] And investigating now, it's, I suppose, different with new technologies and everything. How have you managed to engage the newer generation, I suppose, with, with investigative work? Like, what formats do you use or what formats are you do you do you lean towards more formats, when trying to engage the younger generation versus others?

[Participant 4] Number 1 is social media, but particularly now, but this, we have been using TikTok, because many young people are on TikTok.

[Interviewer] Yes. That's true. Okay. And then, another question I have for you is what recommendations would you offer to, to media organizations or journalists or policymakers, to

promote and protect investigative journalism in the Philippines.

[Participant 4] Recommend to whom?

[Interviewer] To anyone, to policymakers or media organizations or even individual journalists.

[Participant 4] I hope more people would fund investigative journalism across the globe because that would help a lot of countries and a lot of democracies and a lot of poor people who need journalists to investigate things for them.

[Participant 4] Hold on, Beverly. Let me just, I'll just step out for 2 minutes.

[Interviewer] Sure. No problem.

[Participant 4] Hello, Beverly? Hi. Sorry. Sorry. I had to step out.

[Interviewer] Oh, no worries. No worries. So just wondering since you've worked as a journalist for so long, you've worked through many, administrations then, the government administrations. Have you seen a large shift in attitude towards the press the press through these different administrations?

[Participant 4] Well, the biggest shift was during the administration because they were they really harassed the press. But, the other administrations are, you know, there's kind of hostility, but it is not as bad as the due 30 years. Maybe the due 30 years brought us to a different kind of low.

[Interviewer] Oh. So yeah. And how did they, in the Duterte, administration harass how did they harass the through what through what ways did they harass the press?

[Participant 4] Well, they banned people from press conferences. They, their trolls, harassed many journalists. President Duterte, uttered cuss words against journalists, so things like that.

Oh, okay. And, of course, file cases against, journalists, including Rappler.

[Interviewer] Oh, wow. Okay. And the cases would be on the basis of what exactly?

[Participant 4] Well, they would find different grounds, like, for example, libel. Or in the case of Rappler, they would say that we violated business rules in the Philippines or taxation rules in the Philippines, which are not true, of course.

[Interviewer] Wow. Okay. And when you cover these difficult stories, when cases are filed against you, as individual journalists, I suppose, Do you have legal protection from the newsroom? Because I know some newsrooms have, for example, in house lawyers, or things like that.

[Participant 4] Yes. We do. For Rappler?

[Interviewer] I see. Okay. And then lastly, just on also going off of how long you've worked as a journalist through the different administrations, has the access to information have you seen a a large shift, in the access to information for journalists throughout these administrations?

[Participant 4] Well, the access is, well, it depends per administration. The access tends to be, difficult at times, but it was really most difficult during the 30 years. Thankfully, now it has gone to the access has been more ease has been a bit easier, but, not as easy as we would want it to be.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. I see. And how has it become easier to access information, for example?

[Participant 4] Well, first of all, the president himself is available for, media interviews, from time to time, the ambush interviews and the government agencies, do not ban news organizations anymore just like they did during the 30 years, and, some documents are easier to get nowadays.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay. Perfect. And I think, actually, those are all the questions that I have. So, I just I want to thank you again so much for your time. I know it's valuable, especially in your line

of work.

[Participant 4] Thank you very much. Thank you for thinking of us, Beverly. Sure. Thank you so much.

[Interviewer] Thank you. Bye. Thank you.

Interview 5

[Interviewer] Hi.

[Participant 5] Hi.

[Interviewer] Can you hear me okay?

[Participant 5] Yes. I can hear you fine.

[Interviewer] Perfect. Thank you so much for joining. I know you're a very busy person, so I really appreciate it. Okay. And I'm just going to record this, just for transcription purposes, but everything will be anonymous. Okay.

[Participant 5] No problem.

[Interviewer] So, yeah, you've done a lot of investigative work in the past. I see that you've been working in the industry for a very long time, and you've done a lot of investigative reports, so that's really amazing. So can maybe just start by telling me, how long you've worked as a journalist and about your past in journalism?

[Participant 5] Well, just for the record, I'm 55 years old, so the date would definitely be, quite large, even before you were born, in other words. 1988 was the time when I became a campus journalist. So I was, a student of the University of the Philippines, and I became part of the

campus publication called the Philippine Collegian. So you can say that that was the start of my journalism work. I wouldn't call it a career because when you say career, it's more of individual fulfillment. As early as that time, I see journalism as a necessary tool in the shaping of public opinion, and I see it more as an advocacy, as a passion. Okay? So from so upon my graduation in 1991, I became part of the alternative media. So I started with, the, publications of development NGOs. Of course, they're gone now. They've disbanded already, and then I transferred to Ebon Foundation. I became editor in chief of Ebon Facts and Figures. Ebon is, Ebon means bull in Filipino. Okay. Anyway, just to provide some background, Ebon is Ebon Foundation is a is a research think tank. So Ebon, the bird is a symbol of peace, prosperity, freedom, and all that. So I was editor in chief of Ebon Facts and Figures. So it's one of the flag it's the flagship publication of that particular NGO. It still exists up to now. And then after Even Foundation, I became part of I'm not sure if you're familiar with it. It's an alternative online publication called, which has been subjected to various forms of, harassment and intimidation. I became, so that was 2,001. I guess that's the more significant aspect of my journalism work. So starting 2,001, I became part of Bullet Flat. 2,006, I became I started, writing a column writing a column for Pinoy Weekly. And then I've also been writing for other publications, like the East Asia Forum that's based in, that's based from the Australian National University, among many other, publications. So you can say that my journalism has been, you know, existing for the past few decades starting 1988.

[Interviewer] And, since you've been around in the profession for so long, have you seen, a significant evolution in the in the profession throughout the different administrations that you've worked, in?

[Participant 5] Yeah. Definitely. There's evolution in the sense that, if you want to talk about technological development, so from print, and broadcast, we now starting in the 19 nineties, I've also embraced, what we call online journalism. And, when you talk about investigative reporting, which is the subject of your study, it has become more multimedia, more interactive. So there still exists what we call the long form journalism. But, of course, long form, would need to be complemented by bite sized, what we call snackable, videos uploaded on TikTok or Reels or IG stories or what have you. So we see not just the importance of websites, but also, social media accounts, not just from the news media organization, but also the personal social media accounts,

of the journalists. So we're seeing that kind of evolution. Engagement with audiences, there are no mechanisms for that. So unlike in the 1980's or the 1990's where sometimes you don't know or you have no idea as to how people received your work or whether or not it's being read at all, now you know, it gets viral. You have real time data. You have real time metrics, to assess what kind of, which part audiences would appreciate in terms of topics that you write about. So I do appreciate that kind of real time data so that you can have an idea of, how effective, your intended message is and whether or not, it's being read at all.

[Interviewer] And do you use this sort of data to kind of gauge how much public trust and how much interest the younger generation has, in the news that you make, the investigative reports that you do now?

[Participant 5] Yeah. Most definitely. I try to assess, whether or not, for example, Filipino, the Filipino language, would be better appreciated by my fellow Filipinos. So because, I write in 2 languages, and I have to admit, when I was starting out, I was more fluent in English than in Filipino. That's the irony of Philippine education for you given the colonial nature. Well, it's a long story. But the bottom line is that, the fact that I'm able now to write, and I'd like to think that my Filipino language has improved, greatly compared to the time that I was younger. It's all because of real time data. It means that in other words, from my experience, people would tend to appreciate more, the intended message if it's written in our own language, contrary to the common perception that, if you want to go international, you have to write in English. Yeah. Of course, the international audience would be important here. But given the reality that, those who read me would be more Filipinos rather than foreigners, I see nothing wrong with writing in my own language. So that's how useful a real time data would be.

[Interviewer] And, you said that you write for Bulatlat. That's in the Filipino language. Right?

[Participant 5] No. Okay. Let me be clear. Pinoy Weekly is the one written in Filipino. Bulatlat, has a mix of English and Filipino. So there are certain articles that I write. Well, I will not let bottom line is that I can write in 2 languages for that publication. For Pinoy weekly, it's just, in Filipino. So just to be clear on that. Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. I also mentioned that I write for the East

Asia Forum. So that's meant for an international audience because, it's published by the Australian National University. So that's how I'm that's how I am somewhat forced to write in English because, the East Asia Forum is mainly for an international audience.

[Interviewer] That's perfect. You mentioned earlier that for Bulatlat, the organization faced, harassment. Can you tell me more about this?

[Participant 5] It's not just Bulatlat face, or that faces, harassment and intimidation. It's also Pinoy Weekly. These are 2 alternative news media organizations that have been accused of having links with communists and terrorists. So, actually, when was that? June 2022, we were ordered blocked by the government. So if you're in the Philippines, unless you have a VPN or unless you adjust your DNS settings, which are not usually done by, you know, ordinary Internet surfers, you won't be able to access our website because there's a government order banning us here in the Philippines. So it's a form of censorship because, that's why, for Bulatlat in the case of Bulatlat, we've decided to take them to court. So temporarily, we are unblocked while the case is still pending. But, of course, you don't know what's gonna happen, to the case. If it's if it's in our favor, then we will be unblocked, you know, perpetually. But, if the decision of the judge would be against us, then we will be blocked again. So that's one form of harassment. We've also been, subjected to cyberattacks. It's called DDoS, distributed denial of service attacks. The most brazen was in 2019. So, again, we took we took the sources of the cyberattacks to court. It was settled, out of court, fortunately. So, that's it. But after 2019, there were also other cases of cyberattacks. And this time, we were able to trace the IP address to the Philippine Army. So we've taken, to we've taken to task the Philippine Army for the cyberattacks. Of course, they continue to deny it. They said that they were just visiting our website, but we told them, well, the forensic data would show that what you were visiting are not, you know, the publicly available websites you were trying to access, the CGI scripts, and other I don't want to go into the technicals, but bottom line is that what they're doing is penetration testing. They were trying to test the vulnerability of our website, which should not be done because cyber ethics would tell you that if you do penetration testing, you need to get the consent of the website owner. They did not get our consent. They just proceeded with penetration testing. So there's something sinister there. During and we've been accused, you know, the reality of red tag. We've been red tagged several times, both as an

institution and as individuals. So the editor-in-chief and I... we've been red-tagged as individuals. So, it endangers not just our own security, our own personal lives, but it also compromises the safety and security of our loved ones, of our, you know, family members. So that's why, yeah, the Committee to Protect Journalists is right in saying that, the Philippines is one of the most dangerous places to practice journalism even if, and this is the ironic part: we are one of the freest press in Asia. Freest in the sense that there's a constitutional guarantee, regarding the fact that no one shall be passed abridging, among others, freedom of the press. But as we always tell... those who are interested to know, what's written on paper is not something that's actually implemented. So you may have freedom of speech, but freedom after speech, what happens to you afterward, would be another matter altogether.

[Interviewer] Yes. And I wanted to ask, like, during these situations, of harassment or red tagging, do you typically, in your past experience in the news outlets that you've written for, have you felt the support of the editor or the board of administration, and legal newsroom support internally?

[Participant 5] Yes. Definitely. For example, for Bulatlat and Pinoy Weekly, we know what we're getting into. We're all part of the alternative media. So more or less, we're all on the same page. Unlike the corporate media or the dominant media where sometimes, you would, internally, you would get blamed for, you know, being in trouble, it doesn't happen with the alternative media. So once you inform your colleagues about what's happening, they will do everything to protect you. And that's what I appreciate about my colleagues in the alternative media.

[Interviewer] And when you're seeking sources for your investigative reports that are from government officials or higher ups, do you have any issues or challenges that you encounter when you try to find information from those sectors?

[Participant 5] Okay. That's a good question. When I try to interview government officials, it's a mixed experience. Sometimes, it would be favorable. They would accommodate me, on the pretext that all journalists should be accommodated. But there are also certain officials who

would say that, why would you interview me when I know that you will just criticize me? You know, things like that. So well, the problem there is there are a lot of onion skinned officials in the Philippines. So, yeah, sometimes I encounter such problems. Yeah. But, yeah, I just go on with my work.

[Interviewer] And how do you navigate these internal ethical challenges, I guess you would say, when you face the barriers to information. I'm sure that you come across challenges, in order to get the information you need. How do you navigate that in your work?

[Participant 5] Sometimes I resort to anonymous sources of information because in government, it's like this. You cannot, say that all officials or all government employees are evil. Sometimes, you know, the nefarious ones are the ones on top, but the middle managers are disillusioned, and sometimes they would tend to sympathize with you. And that's been my experience when you when the higher ups would refuse to talk to you, you would talk to the middle managers, and then they would give you the information you need on condition of anonymity. So resorting to anonymous sources, well, as Poynter Institute said, it's okay if the public good would outweigh the potential harm it will create, especially to the government officials who are being criticized. And I think many officials are aware of that. And sometimes, they would try to prevent you from getting access to information. But, you know, there will always be a way. One thing I learned in journalism is if you're really dead set on getting the information you need and you're very much aware of the ethical steps that you should be taking, you know your ethics, and you wouldn't venture into certain unethical ways to get the information, there will always be a way to do that. Okay? So that's what I try to do.

[Interviewer] Yeah. And I believe it's going to be an election year in the Philippines, if I'm not mistaken.

[Participant 5] Next year.

[Interviewer] Okay. And during this time when, even in the past, when the country is politically charged in a sense. How do you, maintain credibility, with your audience during a time such as

this and in the era, I suppose, of fake news and disinformation and all that?

[Participant 5] Yeah. You have to be consistent with your reportage. You try your best to avoid making mistakes. Of course, that's much easier said than done, but we've been doing a good job, you know, avoiding mistakes by, among others, verifying our data, making sure that we do not make mistakes, especially when making an analysis of very, very sensitive issues. Even with regard to providing the necessary background data, the context of certain issues, you have to be sure that you know what you're talking about. So it takes a lot of research to do that. You don't just rely on one source of information. We do multisourcing, so that's very basic. And actually, when it comes to the editorial review process, since I also come from the academy, we also subject it to something like a de facto peer review process. We don't just let one editor check a certain work. Sometimes it passes through 2 or 3 editors, sometimes even 4, if we're not even sure of how we will handle certain situations. And the good thing about the alternative media is that we practice what we call, we function like an editorial collective. So the reporters, they are not lower level. The editors are not higher level. So we try to be collegial in the way we deal with people. So if ever we have certain criticisms with each other's works, we are very candid about it, and there are no hard feelings. And in fact, if ever there would be mistakes committed, well, I hope not, but if ever we would have that, it will be a collective responsibility. We won't throw certain reporters or certain editors under the bus, so to speak. So if you function like an editorial collective, then mistakes will also be collectively assumed or collectively absorbed. So that's how we work. So and I think it works well because we are more careful about what we put out in in the public sphere because we know that, all of us will be held accountable. So we cannot just for example, as associate editor, I cannot just say that, oh, that particular article, I didn't edit it, so it's not my fault. I don't do that, and I won't do that ever. So if we are conscious of that kind of a setup, then the fresh then that's all the more pressure for us to do our jobs well.

[Interviewer] And for alternative, news outlets that you've worked for, how would you the resources or financial support that's given to these outlets, I suppose, in comparison to mainstream, outlets? Definitely, the corporate media or the dominant media would have more income, would have more capitalization.

[Participant 5] Actually, in the alternative media, we have no concept. Well, not really concept, but we don't consider whatever we get for funding as income or as revenue. It's not as if we give salaries to people. I mean, I've been with Bulatlat since 2001. And I have been having zero income with them. I don't get paid for what I do. Why is this so? Because I believe in what Bulatlat stands for. And in terms of sources of income, well, that's why I am associate professor of the University of the Philippines. So that's where I get my income. I mean, I don't need Bulatlat to pay me for what for whatever services I do to them. And in fact, when Bulatlat was still starting, when we were short on funds, sometimes I would be the one to shell out money for food during production work. I mean, I'm willing to do that. Not because I'm rich, not because I have a lot of money, but because I believe in that. Okay? So that's how we work. So if you consider the fact that we are well, not we're not really small, in the sense that, I don't have an exact count right now, but it's safe to say that we are more than 20 people if we consider the writers and the regular contributors. But we occupy a very, very small office. So we spend some money for the monthly rental. But other than that, our overhead expenses would be the barest minimum. So, of course, we need funding, but we do project, I'm not sure if you're going to ask that question, but we have, project proposals. We get we are able to find ways to get, funding, in other words. To some extent, I am optimistic that we can make it sustainable. And worst-case scenario, we can just, scale down on our overhead expenses, because we don't have salaries to worry about. I mean, Bulatlat doesn't have to worry about me leaving them because they don't pay me enough because they don't pay me at all, and I'm aware of that. Okay? So yeah. So that's what's different about the alternative media as compared the dominant media where you need to have management employee relationship. As I told you a while ago, we don't consider our reporters or our staff as employees. They are colleagues, and we are all on the same page. That's why they in the same way that I don't mind that being paid, they also don't mind, you know, that kind of a setup.

[Interviewer] And during the investigative reports that you've done throughout the years, how would you say that it's different between, for example, government and administration since you've worked through many? The types of investigative stories that you've approached, have they differed, with these different government administrations?

[Participant 5] Administrations change, but the structure of government has not changed. So the same problems still apply regardless of who is in charge. So there will always be override. There will always be recurring themes, throughout, you know, the history of the history of governance in the Philippines. So let's be specific. So I started, journalism under the Cory Aquino administration. And then after Aquino, there was Ramos, Estrada, and then Marcos. Jr administrations. So those administrations, there may be different sets of leaders, but what are the recurring issues that we've talked about? Human rights, you know, the crisis brought about by the economy, you know, poverty, injustices. In the context of media. We're talking of culture of impunity, which was the subject of my doctoral thesis. Well, anyway, I just finished my doctorate last week. I was in Germany last week. So, actually, that's the reason why we have to reset the meeting to this week. But, yeah, culture of impunity. You know, those recurring themes, would tend to be always discussed because the leaders may change, but the system, that brings about such problems, they also still exist. So they tend to continue. Although I would counter argue as well that, or sorry. Not counter argue. Although I may also interject that under Duterte, it's a little bit different, in the sense that he is more brazen. He's more, for lack of a better term, more fascistic than, the other government than the other, presidents. I'm not saying that he's the worst, but probably, he's very much, you know, just like Trump. Very misogynist, very unhinged, and all that. So when you criticize him, it's at a different level. With other leaders, you can be a little bit polite, but, here, you can be more candid. Of course, still following journalistic tenets of, you know, truth telling and humaneness and, you know, and all that. But, you tend to call out Duterte more often, rather than the other administrations. Of course, under the Marcos Junior administration, it's also at a different level because he still is the son of the dictator that was ousted in 1986. So the idea of another Marcos governing the country. It's something that, cannot sink in, especially to the media, who have been victims, of repression under martial law. So don't get me wrong. Under martial law, I was still an elementary and high school. I spent elementary and high school under the regime of martial law. I was not yet a working student at that particular time, but I do know the history of martial law, not just because I experienced it at a younger age, but because, when you study the media, you cannot help but also analyze what happened during martial law. So, under the regime of Marcus Junior, you know, the shadow of the father, will still be there. And you cannot blame us for saying that, you know, you cannot blame us for denying that the sins of the father is not necessarily the sins of the

son because, he benefited a lot during martial law, and it's not as if he has shown remorse for what happened then. In fact, he even denies, you know, human rights violations, during the time of his father, and he said that his father is the greatest president ever. I mean, how can you be the greatest if you're the most, if you're too evil and to the point where you get compared to Hitler, for example, during the time of martial law. You know, those things. Okay. I tend to talk too much. So, anyway, it's okay. Please interrupt me.

[Interviewer] I just had, one more question just in light of all this. What recommendations would you offer to what recommendations would you offer to policymakers or media organizations or, even individual journalists to promote and protect investigative journalism in the Philippines?

[Participant 5] Well, of course, for government, it's quite simple. End the culture of impunity. Stop the killings. I'm not saying that government is directly responsible. They're not the ones pulling the trigger, but they tend to create an atmosphere where the culture of impunity still continues because the slow pace of the judicial system, for example, would tend to embolden those who would want to commit certain crimes against journalists. Of course, there are certain policy measures that we've recommended to be pursued like the decriminalization of libel. So, when you say decriminalized, you have to remove the prospects of imprisonment if you are convicted of libel because right now, it's being weaponized by certain characters. They are using the law to make journalists think twice about, speaking truth to power, so to speak. So, it's as simple as asking the government to respect the, you know, the work of journalists and to expect, you know, criticisms, because being adversarial is innate in journalism. I mean, various journalism textbooks use the word adversarial to describe the role of the press. I mean, what do you expect? Do you expect docility among members of the press? Of course not. So, of course, for fellow journalists, for colleagues in the profession, the expectation is to continue the culture of investigative journalism among many other affirmative actions that should be done. Because the problem with the Philippines is, I'm not sure if you're aware of it, investigative journalism is not being pursued by many news media organizations. The only notable exceptions would be the PCIJ, Philippine Center For Investigative Journalism, VERA Files. Sometimes Rappler will do investigative journalism. So these are the alternative media, like, you know, weekly and Bulatlat also do investigative journalism, but our reach is quite limited. Now why does why is it that

investigative journalism is not being pursued? Number 1, Investigative journalism is not being pursued by many news media organizations. Many media owners see it as too capital intensive because you have to spend a lot of money for an output that would take several weeks to be produced and distributed, as compared to a news article that would be finished in just, you know, a few minutes or even a few hours. So the culture in many of these media organizations is quantity over quality of journalistic output. So for me, that's a major problem. And sometimes people think that, because of the audience's alleged low attention span, there would be no market or viewers or audiences for long form journalism. Actually, that's wrong because, you can make the uninteresting interesting by making your articles readable using simple language. write your story, write your news, write your angles in such a way that would poke your audiences if you make your topics relatable to the ordinary people. If you use language that's more understandable like Filipino, then, there would be always available audiences for investigative reports.

[Interviewer] Yeah. Thank you. that was a great recommendation. I don't have any more any more questions for you, but, thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it, and it's been very helpful. So thank you again.

[Participant 5] Yeah. Thank you. Good luck on your paper. Goodbye.