

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

As the foundation of human rights, press freedom is inextricably linked to democracy and democratization. Free information exchange is essential to a democratic society because it promotes accountability, transparency, and informed public participation. Journalists can examine, assess and report on government actions without fear of retaliation thanks to press freedom. Press freedom has always been essential to journalists ever since, each individual in the world has the right to engage in press freedom; the right to speak, especially in the field of International Relations relating to media and global journalism. Quoted by the most trusted and respected journalist and scholar from America, Walter Cronkite, *“Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.”*¹

The idea behind press freedom is that using the media for communication and expression is an inherent human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 19 also states that; “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.”²

¹ Saskia Rowley, “WACC | Democracy is Freedom of the Press,” WACC Global, 2020, <https://waccglobal.org/democracy-is-freedom-of-the-press/>

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations,” the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

This emphasizes the right to freedom of opinion and expression, codifying this fundamental principle. In this particular environment, freedom of the press is not merely one aspect of democracy but also a prerequisite to its continued existence and growth. Global perceptions of justice and accountability are fostered by press freedom, which is considered as fundamental human rights and the cornerstone of democracy. The relationship between human rights and press freedom is a crucial axis in international relations that supports the fundamentals of democratic administration, where press freedom plays a worldwide role in shaping international discourse on human rights and democratic values in today's interconnected world, where media narratives create global perceptions.

Such disclosures have the potential to expose powerful organizations, spur foreign support for domestic causes, and hold them accountable. Its ability to cross national boundaries, give voice to marginalized groups, and bring attention to atrocities that might otherwise go unreported is what makes global media so important.³ Hence, global journalism influences foreign relations and politics in addition to educating the public through investigative reporting and prompt information distribution.

By forming storylines, swaying the general public, and holding governments responsible on a global scale, journalism and international relations interact with one another. By drawing attention to important topics like corruption and violations of human rights, the media can have an impact on diplomatic

³ Minority Rights Group International, Covering Migration (2024), https://coveringmigration.com/learning_pages/what-is-global-journalism/

relations. Reports from credible media sources, for example, may result in international censure, penalties, or actions. Journalists play an important role in international relations, including soft power; nations with a free and active press are frequently more credible and influential internationally. As a result, journalism influences and reflects global processes.⁴

Alluding to this, interaction of the media, the government, and society is included in journalism politics. Journalists frequently work in a complicated environment where social, political, and economic forces can have an impact on their work.⁵ Using strategies like censorship, propaganda, and repression, governments may try to regulate or manipulate the media in an effort to hold onto power and shape public opinion.⁶ Independent media, on the other hand, aims to oppose these pressures by disseminating factual, impartial information. A distinguishing characteristic of media politics is the conflict between government control and the free press, which affects civic involvement and democracy.⁷

This is bound to happen across the world, including in a certain country in South East Asia. The Philippines is a country where the media is subject to government control. President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines President in the year 2016-2022, has been known for severely restricting press freedom, especially

⁴ National Research University Higher School of Economics, "Journalism Courses," Journalism in International Relations – HSE University Course Catalogue – Higher School of Economics National Research University, 2019, <https://www.hse.ru/en/edu/courses/292692699>

⁵ Kiran Voleti, "Political Journalism: The Role of Journalism in Politics," Political Marketing, 2022, <https://politicalmarketer.com/political-journalism/>

⁶ Cristina C. Huci and Alexander Hamilton, "Selective Control: The Political Economy of Censorship," Taylor & Francis, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2022.2074587>

⁷ Federico Casalegno, Diana Owen, and José L. Pardo, "The New Media's Role in Politics," BBVA OpenMind, 2018, <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-new-media-s-role-in-politics/>

concerning Rappler, a newsroom based in the Philippines co-founded by Maria Ressa, a seasoned journalist,⁸ In 2021 Maria Ressa won the Nobel Peace prize, she received the award along with a Russian journalist, Dmitry Muratov. The citation of the Nobel Peace prize to her is "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."⁹ Well-known for its scathing reporting on the Duterte regime, Rappler has had to deal with a lot of legal issues, intimidation, and threats. The crackdown intensified as Rappler covered stories on Duterte's war on drugs, including extrajudicial executions and misinformation efforts. In the Philippines, journalists who have attempted to reveal these truths have run into grave danger, including murder. Threats to their lives and outright murders have been commonplace for Filipino journalists who have ventured to reveal and disseminate these truths.

In addition to specifically targeting individual journalists, Duterte's government has fostered an environment that is not only hostile to the press but also systematically seeks to dismantle the foundations of independent and free media in the Philippines. This repression is particularly evident in the actions taken against Rappler, a prominent media outlet that has faced various forms of harassment, legal challenges, and threats. The situation has escalated to such a degree that journalists in the Philippines have been murdered for attempting to expose disinformation and corruption, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship among media practitioners

⁸ Michael Ray, "Rodrigo Duterte: Facts, Biography, Education, & Controversies," *Britannica*, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rodrigo-Duterte>

⁹ The Nobel Prize, "Maria Ressa – Facts – 2021," *NobelPrize.org*, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2021/ressa/facts/>.

as the situation involving Rappler draws attention to the wider fight for press freedom in the Philippines and emphasizes how dangerous it is for journalists to work in authoritarian countries.¹⁰

The plight of Rappler and the broader context of press repression in the Philippines are crucial for understanding the global fight for press freedom. The targeting of journalists and media organizations like Rappler by Duterte's administration exemplifies the dangers faced by the press in authoritarian contexts. It underscores the importance of maintaining democratic values and upholding media integrity, even in the face of tyrannical governance. Global press freedom concerns are a constant reminder of these interconnected themes in the sphere of international relations. Reporters encounter increasing dangers everywhere they go deriving from digital surveillance and physical assault to censorship and legal repercussions. Not only do these obstacles hinder unrestricted communication, but they also weaken worldwide campaigns to uphold human rights. From this research, it implores to expand the awareness and understanding of how media, disinformation, and politics are critical and pivotal through "*Rappler's Fight for Press Freedom: Duterte's Media Repression and Global Advocacy for Democracy (2016-2020)*."

¹⁰ Jodesz Gavilan, "Duterte's Violent War on Drugs, as Recorded by Rights Groups, Int'l Bodies," *Rappler*, 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/list-reports-documentation-rodrigo-duterte-drug-war-killings/>

1.2 Research Question

This research focuses on the persecution that journalists in the Philippines undergo as they compete against Duterte as well as discover the truth. While there are a number of journalists from various media outlets involved, specifically connected to the government's drug-related war killings, the main focus of this research is Rappler's role in maintaining media trustworthiness in the context of misinformation, government control over the media in the Philippines, and press freedom. Moreover, during his rule, this behavior culminated in several murderous rampages and the arrest of journalists who attempted to uncover the truth about his wickedness. This event has been circulating for a while now and Rappler journalists were also involved as well, and they believe that this matter in hand should be resolved in justice. The significance of the fight for truth and the press freedom act by Rappler against Duterte truly is phenomenal.

This issue has already kickstarted the elements of international relations in referring to Rappler as the non-state actor and the Philippine government under Duterte as the state actor, suggesting that the focus and boundaries explored in this particular thesis are between non-state and state. Additionally stating towards Rappler's impact or influence through the international media and audience for their perseverance in fighting against the harsh and cruel government. Ultimately this thesis seeks to answer two research questions below:

1. What are the reasons for Rappler in exposing Duterte's action in limiting press freedom in the Philippines within the context of global press freedom advocacy and democracy?

2. How does Rappler's fighting for press freedom in the Philippines contributed to the global fight for press freedom advocacy and democracy?

1.3 Research Objectives

Within the research objectives laid out, the objectives of this thesis include the following:

1. To analyze how Rappler's fight for press freedom in the Philippines has contributed to global press freedom advocacy and democracy.
2. To comprehend the underlying reasons for Rappler's efforts in exposing President Duterte's actions in limiting press freedom, particularly within the broader framework of global press freedom advocacy and democratic values.

1.4 Research Significance

The research explores critical gaps in understanding the role of media organizations, with a focus on Rappler, in shaping global perceptions and influencing international relations, particularly in the context of diplomacy and human rights advocacy. It examines how Rappler's activities affect international views of the Philippines and its relationships with countries that prioritize human rights and press freedom. By analyzing Rappler's efforts to uphold press freedom under the Duterte administration, the study highlights the importance of independent journalism in maintaining democratic values and human rights. It

demonstrates how outlets like Rappler serve as watchdogs, holding those in power accountable and providing the public with accurate information.

This research is particularly relevant in an era where fake news and disinformation threaten democracy. It sheds light on how media suppression can influence global opinions and diplomatic relations. The global scrutiny and criticism surrounding the Rappler case have impacted the Philippines' international reputation. By exploring these dynamics, the study enhances our understanding of how press freedom violations can affect a nation's global standing and foreign relations.

Additionally, the findings offer insights into how a media organization like Rappler can shape international perceptions of a country, elucidating the ways media narratives influence global discourse. Understanding the media landscape in the Philippines and its impact on international relations, especially with countries that emphasize human rights and press freedom, underscores the significance of media freedom in shaping diplomatic strategies and managing national image.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters: introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, analysis, and conclusion. The introductory chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research, establishing the context by discussing the background of the issues, identifying the key actors involved, and underscoring the study's relevance within the discipline of International Relations.

Additionally, it articulates the research questions, objectives, and the broader significance of the inquiry.

The subsequent chapter, Theoretical Framework, presents an in-depth exploration of the theoretical underpinnings that guide this research. This includes a thorough review of pertinent literature, which is categorized into three critical areas: the state of democracy in the Philippines under Duterte's presidency, Duterte's control and influence over the media, and the counterstrategies employed by the media in response. Moreover, this chapter elucidates the liberalism theory and human rights concepts that are pivotal to the analysis, emphasizing the imperative to advocate for democracy while critically assessing Duterte's administration. The third chapter, Methodology, provides a detailed account of the research design, outlining the methodological approach, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures employed throughout the study.

The fourth chapter, Results and Discussions, constitutes the crux of the thesis, offering a rigorous examination of the research questions through the application of the theoretical perspectives and concepts introduced earlier. This chapter systematically integrates significant empirical data with preliminary findings to construct a comprehensive response to the research questions.

The final chapter, Conclusion and Recommendation, synthesizes the findings of the analysis, providing a conclusive summary of the research. It also calls upon readers to heighten their awareness of issues pertaining to the violation of freedom of speech and the proliferation of media disinformation. Having outlined the structure of this thesis and the key components that will be explored in

subsequent chapters, the discussion now transitions to chapter two, the theoretical framework. This chapter serves as the foundation of the research, providing the essential theories and conceptual lenses through which the complex dynamics of press freedom, media control, and democratic erosion under Duterte's administration in the Philippines will be critically analyzed. By engaging with relevant literature and establishing a robust theoretical basis, chapter two prepares the groundwork for the detailed analysis that follows, ensuring that the research is firmly anchored in established scholarly discourse.

