

The Politicization of News: Evidence from Major Philippine Broadsheets

Manuel O. Diaz, Jr.*

Ateneo de Naga University, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The news is expected to be apolitical, even if it reports about a political subject matter. Its politicization erodes public trust. Striking a balance before an increasingly polarized consumer base, however, is precarious, particularly in banner headlines. There is only one banner headline in every issue of a newspaper, and all news of the day compete for that sweet spot above the fold, written in big bold letters, trying to attract attention. Partisan tendency can manifest itself in the choice and construction of the banner headline. In this study, banner headlines from six of the major English-language newspapers in the Philippines collected over two months were analyzed for signs of politicization. Results show strong politicization in the banner headlines of the broadsheets with the lowest reach and circulation. In addition, politicization tends to significantly lean towards the incumbents. Notably, one newspaper has shown very little politicization, and with an even spread between the two sides of the political spectrum. Politicization is not necessarily bad, but that it should be tempered or otherwise disclosed. There is nothing more insidious and manipulative than a biased source of information disguised as a balanced view.

Keywords: Politicization of news, Banner headlines, Media bias, Philippines

Article Info

Received June 20, 2023

Revised November 6, 2023

Accepted December 6, 2023

CONTACT

Manuel O. Diaz, Jr. (J.D., University of Nueva Caceres, Philippines) is an adjunct faculty member, Ateneo de Naga University, Philippines.

***Corresponding author's email:** mdiazjr@gbox.adnu.edu.ph

Introduction

Media and politics are social institutions that are intricately intertwined. One impacts the other. Media can strongly influence political outcomes, and politicians are aware of this (Cohen, Tsfati, & Shearer, 2008). They try to be on the good side of the news, and in many cases to such an extent that the issue of mediatization of politics became a concern (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 2010). Meanwhile, media coverage of the political processes is an integral part of journalism. Striking a balance between what to cover and what not to cover is like walking on thin ice. Bias, real or imaginary, is easily perceived, particularly when one gets more mileage compared to the other side of the political spectrum. As such, accusations of political partisanship have hounded the media (Höppner & Burack, 2020). And in the Philippines, when a politician cannot stand any form of public scrutiny, perhaps because they have nothing of substance to offer or that their position is indefensible, the easy way out is to accuse the media of bias in an attempt to discredit it and whatever information media has that can work against the political agenda of the politician. Discrediting the media, according to US journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Anne Appelbaum, is a calculated move to shut down the competition (Höppner & Burack, 2020).

Accusations of media bias are not new, but it gained traction and momentum under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. A University of the Philippines research called this the Duterte factor (Beltran, 2017). Prior to the 2016 National Elections, Duterte claimed that the media was biased (Corrales, 2016). This was echoed by his supporters (Luna, 2016). When he was already president, he singled out the broadsheet Philippine Daily Inquirer and broadcast giant ABC-CBN (Araneta, 2017), which he successfully shut down in 2020 (BBC, 2020).

When the news is critical, it has become practice among traditional politicians to claim that it is politically motivated, portraying the news to be biased (Relativo, 2021; Valderama, 2022). As a candidate for president in the 2022 National Elections,

Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of ousted dictator Ferdinand and graft convict Imelda, justified his non-attendance in the Jessica Soho interviews by accusing the veteran journalist of bias, just because Soho asks critical questions regardless of who she is interviewing (Galvez, 2022). The Marcos Jr campaign was marked by non-appearance in public debates and the marginalization of legitimate journalists in favor of vloggers and social media influencers paid hefty sums to misinform and disinform (Beltran, 2022; Buan, 2022; Coronel, 2022; Mendoza, 2019).

While accusations of bias from Philippine politicians the likes of Duterte and Marcos, Jr. are mere maneuvers to further political agenda, corruption is actually an issue that plagues the Philippine press. The dictatorship of the most corrupt president the Philippines ever had, Ferdinand Marcos--father and namesake of Marcos, J.--more than 30 years ago, has weakened professionalism and politicized the media to a staggering degree (Neumann, 2005). Paid-for journalism, a lingering legacy of the Marcos dictatorship, is tacitly acknowledged but is never really discussed in the open (Magno, 2004). Many of the so-called journalists-for-a-fee leverage commentaries, editorials, and opinion pieces to advance their agenda or that of their patron politician. The news, on the other hand, is not expected to express opinion. It is supposed to report facts, so there is a general expectation that the news remains objective. The Philippine public, as with people from the 37 other countries around the world surveyed by the Pew Research Center, expects unbiased news (Mitchell, Simmons, Matsa & Silver, 2018).

Literature Review

Valdeavilla and Pulido (2019) studied how the top three Philippine broadsheets, i.e. Manila Bulletin (or simply Bulletin), Philippine Daily Inquirer (or simply Inquirer), and Philippine Star (or simply Star) reported news about the Battle of Marawi, when the city was under siege from terrorist groups in 2017. Using

sentiment analysis, they concluded that there was a prevalence of bias in a large proportion of news. The duo further opined that because the sentiment polarity of the news from the aforementioned media outlets were similar in proportion, there was collusion among the newspapers.

Meanwhile, in a separate study using a methodology that combined sentiment analysis with machine learning, Quijote, Zamora, and Ceniza (2019) concluded that *Bulletin*, *Inquirer* and *Star* are neutral. They used lexicon-based sentiment analysis combined with the Inverse Reinforcement Model (IRM), a machine-learning framework that is capable of detecting more than just bias. They reported that *Manila Times* (or simply the *Times*) has been deemed biased by the IRM.

Diaz (2021) also used sentiment polarity analysis and found that there is a tendency to use the negative tone among six of the English-language broadsheets in the Philippines but did not make the hasty conclusion of bias, and rightly so. The negative or the positive tone of the news should not be immediately taken as bias. Bias is more nuanced than sentiment polarity. For example, in a two-way contest during the campaign period of an election, news coverage of only one of the candidates regardless of consistent neutral sentiment polarity in the language used can be hardly called unbiased. However, almost equal coverage of the two contenders can likewise be hardly called non-partisan if all news about one side is positive while news about the other is all negative.

Existing literature that treats alleged bias in Philippine media establishes bias based merely on sentiment polarity. This approach is haphazard. While it is true that description bias can manifest through sentiment polarity of news articles (Shultziner & Stukalin, 2020), a conclusion of partisanship bias may be difficult to make without further context. This study extends it by taking a more nuanced look at bias. It attempts to establish whether or not the major broadsheets of the Philippines exhibit politicization, and if they do, the degree by which political partisanship is manifested will be quantified.

Method

This is an exploratory study, which makes the consecutive sampling approach a good choice for data sampling. According to Polit and Beck (2017), consecutive sampling is considered the best among the non-probability sampling methods because it controls sampling bias by including all available subjects. In this case, the data consists of 366 banner headlines from the top six English-language newspapers of national circulation in the Philippines collected over a two-month period between 01 May 2021 and 30 June 2021 from the social media site, *Broadsheets Philippines* (www.fb.com/broadsheetsPH).

The first of these six, arranged alphabetically, is *Daily Tribune* (tribune.net.ph), or just *Tribune*, based out of 3450 Concept Building on Florida Street in Makati City, was founded in 2000. In 2018, it was acquired by Concept and Information Group, Inc. (CNN Philippines Staff, 2020). It is one of the few broadsheets in the country with nationwide sales, but it has not made it to the top ten newspapers in the Philippines (Vera Files, 2016) in terms of readership. If its social media presence will be used to gauge its reach—the Philippines is, after all, known as the “Social Media Capital of the World” (Pablo, 2018)—*Tribune* (fb.com/tribunephil) has 671,234 followers on Facebook as of 27 January 2023.

The second in the list is *Manila Bulletin* (mb.com.ph), the second oldest broadsheet in the Philippines, headquartered at the corner of Muralla and Recoletos Streets in Intramuros, City of Manila. It has outlived foreign occupations, governments and presidents (Vera Files, 2016). Founded in 1900, it is one of the top three most-read newspapers in the country. It is also the most trusted print media brand in the country according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (Chua, 2021). *Bulletin* (fb.com/manilabulletin) has a big social media following with 4,266,696 followers on Facebook as of 27 January 2023.

The third of the six is *Manila Standard* (manilastandard.net) which holds office at the sixth floor of the Universal RE Building, 106 Paseo de Roxas Avenue corner

Perea Street, Legaspi Village in Makati City. It was founded in 1987 and is currently owned by the Romualdez family (Cunanan, 2017), relatives of the graft convict and former first lady Imelda Marcos, wife of dictator and former president Ferdinand (Cabico, 2020). It has a small print circulation, and its social media presence is the smallest among the 6 newspapers identified in this study. Manila Standard, or just Standard (fb.com/ManilaStandardPH), has only 128,908 followers on Facebook as of 27 January 2023.

The fourth is the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (inquirer.net), the newspaper with the biggest circulation in the Philippines. Founded in 1985 and currently based at 1098 Chino Roces Avenue corner Yague and Mascardo Streets, Makati City, it is probably the only broadsheet established under the Marcos regime albeit towards the end of the conjugal dictatorship. Former president and ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, known as one of the most corrupt politicians in the world (Forbes, 2004) and his wife Imelda, closed or took control of most of the Philippine media during their rule. Also known as 'PDI' or just 'Inquirer', it became the paper of the barricades during the 1986 People Power Revolution and went on to become the country's number one newspaper after the Marcoses were toppled and freedom was restored in the Philippines (Yu, 2011). It is now the flagship brand of the Inquirer Group of Companies which is majority-owned by the holding arm of the Rufino-Prieto matriarch. It is the most popular broadsheet in both print form and online according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (Chua, 2021). Its social media following is almost double that of its closest rival Manila Bulletin. Inquirer (fb.com/inquirerdotnet) has 8.1M followers on Facebook as of 27 January 2023.

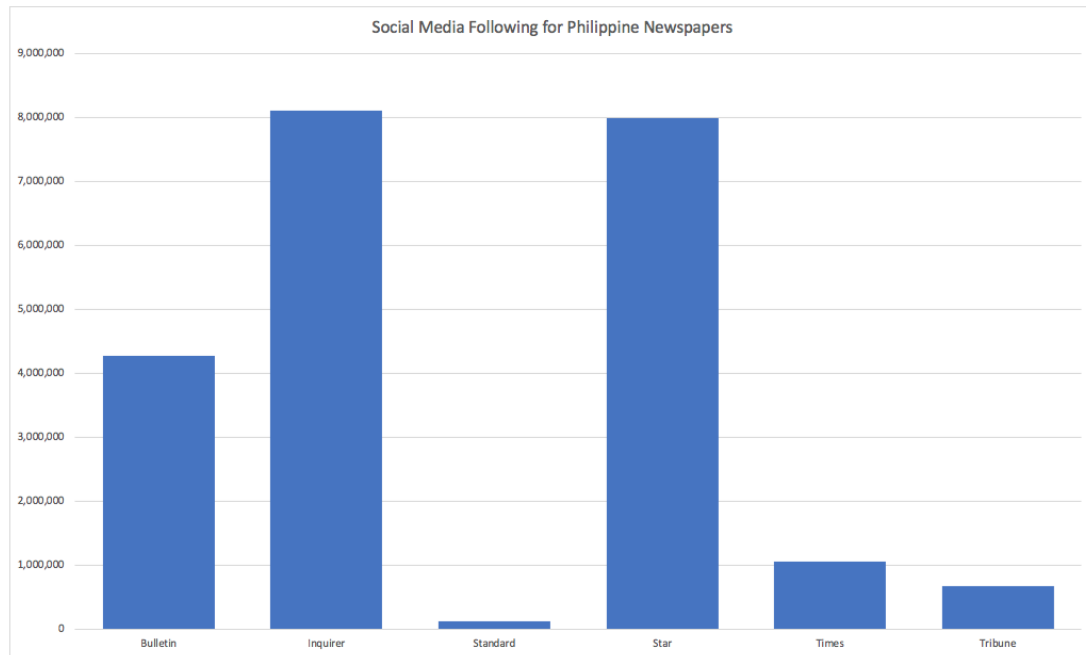
The fifth is *Philippine Star* (philstar.com), which was founded in 1986 by the key founders of Philippine Daily Inquirer after they had irreconcilable differences with the other Inquirer founders (Yu, 2011). With editorial offices at 202 Roberto S. Oca Street corner Railroad Street, Port Area, Manila, it is now

majority-owned by MediaQuest Holdings, the media conglomerate of businessman and PLDT chairman Manuel Pangilinan, through its subsidiary Hastings Holdings. It is one of the top three most sold broadsheets in the Philippines (Vera Files, 2016) and ranks slightly higher in brand trust than Inquirer according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (Chua, 2021). In terms of social media reach, the Star comes a close second to Inquirer with 7,988,729 followers on Facebook (fb.com/PhilippineSTAR) as of 27 January 2023.

Finally, the last in the six is *The Manila Times* (manilatimes.net), the oldest English-language broadsheet in the Philippines with offices at the second floor of the Sitio Grande Building, 409 A. Soriano Avenue, Intramuros, Manila. Founded in 1898 just after the Treaty of Paris was signed and Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States (Viray, 2018), its current publisher is the publicist of former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Dante Ang, who was also former president Rodrigo Duterte's special envoy for international public relations (Elemia, 2017). Despite being the oldest broadsheet in the country, the Times has not reached wide circulation. It is far behind the major dailies Bulletin, Inquirer and Star. Its social media presence is dwarfed by the big broadsheets, but it leads the minor papers with 1,059,906 followers (fb.com/TheManilaTimes).

Figure 1 lists the six newspapers used in this study and shows the number of followers of each in the social media platform Facebook. With the Philippines consistently ranking number one in social media use worldwide (Baclig, 2022), the number of social media followers can very well serve as proxy for the actual reach of a media organization. This is not inconsistent with the 2022 Digital News Report produced by the Reuters Institute which placed Bulletin, Inquirer and Star among the newspapers with the biggest online reach and the highest trusted brands (Chua, 2022).

Figure 1 Social Media Presence of the six English-language Newspapers with the Biggest Circulation in the Philippines



According to the framework proposed by Shultziner and Stukalin (2020), partisanship bias manifests in production tools, such as the banner headline of newspapers. Banner headlines occupy the most prominent real estate of the newspaper. In every issue of a newspaper, there is only one banner headline. News headlines compete for the one spot of being the banner headline. Thus, generally, the banner headline is what the newspaper editors deem to be the most important issue of the day, the most eye-catching, or the most compelling for the readers. Due to the nature of the banner headline that requires the selection of just one headline from among many headlines, subjectivity and bias can easily creep in, consciously or otherwise, in the process of selecting which headline should be the banner headline. Banner headlines are thus a good material for analysis to determine politicization. In this study, banner headlines will be analyzed using the approach of Chinn et al (2020), who assumed that the presence of political actors in news headlines indicates politicization. Where there is explicit mention of politicians' names, nicknames, and aliases, a headline is considered politicized. On the

other hand, headlines that use official titles and roles of politicians without mentioning their monikers are not considered politicized.

It can be argued that the approach of Chinn et al (2020) and the approach taken in this study is narrow. That may be the case, but a more precise--not narrow--definition allows clear focus in this study. By limiting the indicator of politicization to the direct mention of politicians' names or monikers, ambiguity can be avoided, and a targeted analysis is possible. This precision is essential for conducting a systematic and focused study without diluting the research scope. This very approach allowed quantitative analysis in this study, enabling quantification of the frequency of politicization in news headlines more accurately.

A broader definition of politicization might introduce subjectivity into the analysis, making it challenging to draw clear boundaries. By limiting the definition to explicit mentions of politicians, interpretational biases can be avoided and consistency in the analysis is assured. This objectivity is important to this study, particularly because it touches on politicization and objectivity of news. It will be

hypocritical otherwise, and the results of this study will lose credibility.

Thus, this study also assumes that the presence of political actors in news headlines indicates politicization. To facilitate data preparation and coding, a small dictionary is used to consolidate the count of mentions of politicians. For example, former President Duterte has been referred to as ‘Rody,’ ‘DU30,’ or ‘Duterte’ in headlines, while former President Benigno Aquino III has been referred to as ‘Noynoy,’ ‘Pnoy’ or ‘Aquino.’ Thus, headlines that used ‘Rody,’ ‘DU30,’ or ‘Duterte’ are all counted towards a ‘Duterte’ mention, while headlines that used ‘Noynoy,’ ‘Pnoy’ or ‘Aquino’ are all counted towards an

‘Aquino’ mention. Where possible, the surname of a politician is used in coding nicknames and other monikers, except for ‘Sara’ which refers to presidential daughter Sara Duterte— ‘Sara’ is used instead of ‘Duterte’ to distinguish her from the father. The presidential daughter is married, and in the Philippines, married women generally take the surname of the husband. Sara, however, capitalized on the popularity of the ‘Duterte’ brand since her husband’s surname ‘Carpio’ is generally associated with perceived opposition, namely the former justices of the Supreme Court, Antonio Carpio and Conchita Carpio-Morales (see Table 1).

Table 1 Dictionary Used to Harmonize Names of Politicians Mentioned in Newspaper Banner Headlines

Politician	Description	Synonyms
Aquino	Benigno Simeon Aquino, Philippine president (2010-2016)	Pnoy, Noynoy, PNoy, P-Noy
Duterte	Rodrigo Duterte, Philippine president (2016-2022)	Rody, DU30, Digong
Pacquiao	Emmanuel Pacquiao, Senator of the republic (2016-2022)	Pacman

Finally, in mapping out the political divide between the administration and the opposition, the politician’s alignment is considered. The obvious ones that belong to the administration side are the members of the ruling party Partido Demokratiko Pilipino–Lakas ng Bayan (or PDP–Laban), which includes boxer-turned-senator Manny Pacquiao even if he subsequently led a faction that locked horns with the faction led

by Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, and Senator Panfilo Lacson who, despite not being a member of the ruling party, has been largely seen as aligned with the majority. Meanwhile, politicians in the opposition side are those that did not align with the majority. Table 2 lists down the names of politicians who were mentioned at least once in newspaper banner headlines during the period under study and their political alignments.

Table 2 Political Alignment of Politicians Mentioned in Newspaper Banner Headlines

Politician	Political alignment
Año	Administration, Duterte’s appointee
Aquino	Opposition, Liberal Party
Cusi	Administration, Duterte’s appointee
Duterte	Administration, Philippine President
Eleazar	Administration, Duterte’s appointee
Enrile	Administration, perceived alignment
Go	Administration, presidential assistant-turned-senator
Lacson	Administration, perceived alignment

Locsin	Administration, Duterte's appointee
Pacquiao	Administration, member of ruling party
Pimentel	Administration, member of ruling party
Rio	Administration, Duterte's appointee
Robredo	Opposition, Philippine Vice President
Sara	Administration, Presidential daughter
Sotto	Administration, member of ruling party

Results

The 366 news headlines were categorized in two. Headlines that explicitly mention politicians' names or their other monikers were considered politicized following the approach that Chinn et al (2020) used. An example is the 4 May 2021 issue of the Standard, which bannered the headline: "*Locsin: Get the F*** out of WPS*," referring to a social media remark by the Foreign Affairs secretary made as an angry reaction

to the continued incursions of the Chinese militia in Philippine waters. Headlines that do not mention any politician, including those that allude to a political personality but use the title of their office, are considered to be not politicized. An example is the 4 May 2021 issue of the Inquirer which bannered the headline: "*DFA chief spews profanity at China over sea row*," referring to the same subject matter as that of the Standard on the same date. These are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Two Types of Banner Headlines about the Same Issue: Politicized (left) and Non-politicized (right)

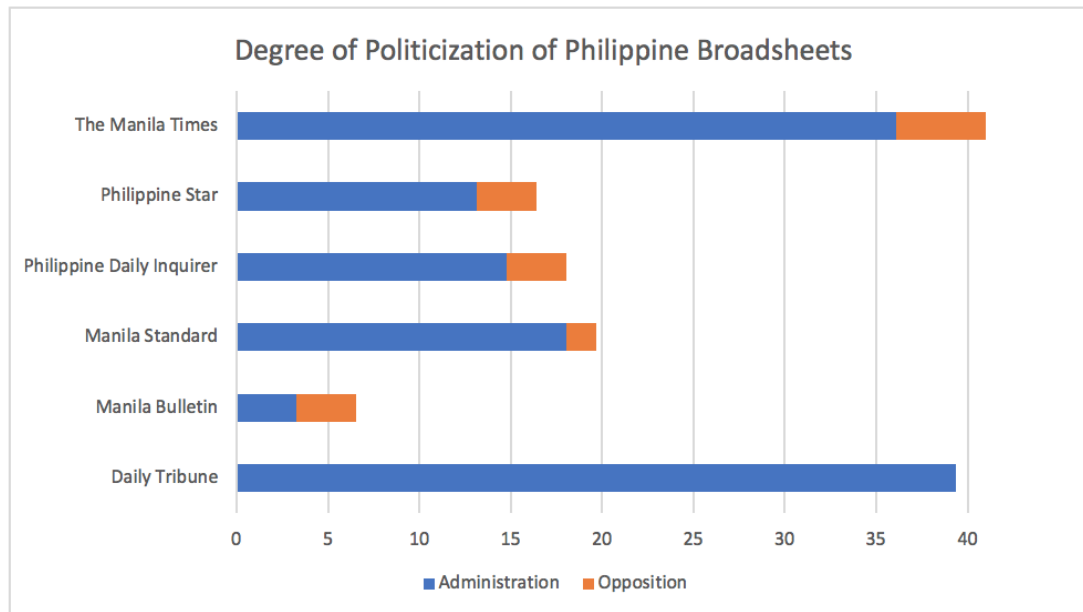


In general, of the 366 news headlines, 86 appear to be politicized, or about 23.5 percent of the sample. Of the politicized headlines, 25 are from the Times, 24 are from the Daily Tribune (or simple Tribune), 12 are from Standard, 11 are from Inquirer, 10 are from Star, and 4 from Bulletin. While overall the data does not support a conclusion that the major English-language broadsheets in the Philippine have been fully politicized, it can be said that there is strong politicization, and all sampled broadsheets appear to have their fair share albeit in varying degrees. In this context, full politicization is a term used to describe the

state of politicization where more than 50% of the time, political actors are present in banner headlines.

For the period of data collection, 61 banner headlines were observed from each broadsheet. The most politicized appear to be the Times. 41 percent of its banner headlines over two months were politicized. The Times is followed by Tribune at a close 39 percent. Standard, Inquirer, and Star are within range of each other with Standard leading at 20 percent, followed by Inquirer at 18 percent and the Star at 16 percent. Notable is Bulletin at only 7 percent. This is shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Degree of Politicization of the Six Sampled Newspapers (in % of Politicized Banner Headlines)



From Figure 3, the degree of politicization of a sampled newspaper is the total length of the bar, which is the sum of the blue and orange segments. The blue segment pertains to the share of the administration in the headlines that mentioned a politician aligned with the political party of the ruling president, while the orange segment pertains to the share of the opposition in the headlines that mentioned a politician perceived as political opposition of the president.

The politicized headlines can be further classified between referring to the incumbents on one side and the perceived opposition on the other end. Of the 86 politicized headlines, 76 refer to incumbents and those aligned with the sitting administration. Only 10 headlines refer to the opposition, 8 of which refer to the immediate past president who passed away unexpectedly. This already shows a strong slant towards the administration.

At the broadsheet level, the degree of politicization towards the politicians aligned with the administration is rather easily observed. The Times had 22 headlines that mentioned pro-administration politicians compared with the 3 headlines that mentioned the opposition. Tribune had all of its 24 politicized headlines mention pro-

administration politicians. Standard had 11 headlines that mentioned pro-administration politicians compared with the 1 headline that mentioned the opposition. The Inquirer had 9 headlines that mentioned pro-administration politicians compared with the 2 headlines that mentioned the opposition. Star had 8 headlines that mentioned pro-administration politicians compared with the 2 headlines that mentioned the opposition. Bulletin had 2 headlines that mentioned pro-administration politicians compared with the 2 headlines that mentioned the opposition, making the spread even.

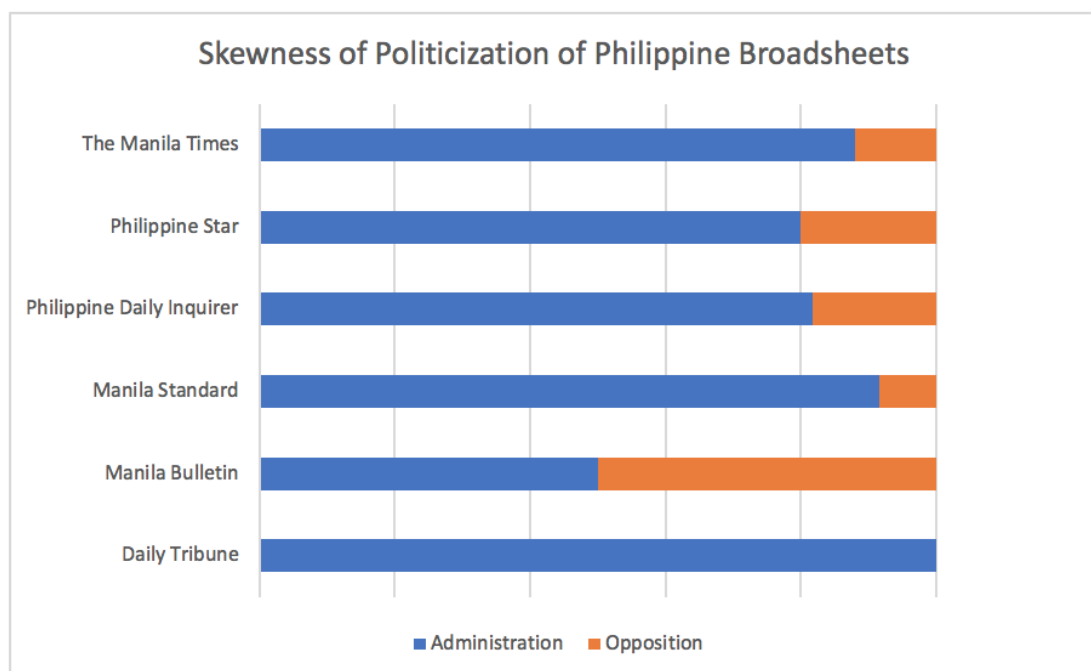
In terms of the proportion of politicized headlines that refer to either side of the political spectrum, Tribune had 100% for the administration and nil for the opposition. Standard had about 92% of its headlines for the administration, with just 8% for the opposition. The Times had 88% of its headlines for the administration, with just 12% for the opposition. Meanwhile, Inquirer had 82% of its headlines politicized towards the administration and 18% towards the opposition, closely followed by Star at 80% for the administration and 20% for the opposition. Bulletin had a remarkable 50-50 split between the two sides, as shown in Figure 4 below. The proportion between politicization in favor of the administration

and politicization in favor of the opposition is shown by the colors of the bar. The blue segment pertains to the administration, while the orange segment pertains to the opposition. It is easy to see that most of the politicization is in favor of the administration, with only a small proportion in favor of the opposition.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that there is evidence of bias in the politicization of the news in the Philippines. While the degree of politicization varies, there is indication that the politicization leans

towards the sitting government. Tribune shows an obvious bias for the Duterte administration. Its politicized banner headlines covered the incumbents only with none for the opposition. Viewed by some as probably a reward for the favorable editorial policy, President Duterte appointed the Tribune publisher and president Wilfredo Fernandez as Manila Economic and Cultural Affairs (MECO) chairman and resident representative (Ranada, 2021) in Taiwan.

Figure 4 Spread of Politicization across the Philippine Political Spectrum



The Times is also noted as highly politicized and with a strong bias in favor of the Duterte administration. The publisher of the Times, Dante Ang, was appointed by President Duterte as special envoy for international public relations (Elemia, 2017), a move that some sectors saw as quid pro quo for the friendly editorial stance. Ang is also the publicist of former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a known Duterte ally.

Finally, the third highly politicized newspaper is Standard. Its tendency to favor the Duterte administration, however, does not surprise kibitzers. Duterte is a Marcos ally, and in fact, his daughter Sara was the running mate of Marcos Jr in the 2022 national elections. Meanwhile, Standard is

owned by the Romualdez family, relatives of the Marcoses by affinity and is alleged to have benefitted immensely from the Marcos dictatorship (Branigin, 1984; Diola, 2017).

Both Star and Inquirer also showed politicization, but to a degree much less than Tribune and the Times--not even half as much--and a little less than Standard. Bulletin, on the other hand, showed the least sign of politicization, and notably at an even spread.

Discussion

Politicization of news refers to the phenomenon by which news content is influenced by political considerations, rather

than being an objective account. Politicization manifests in several ways, such as the inclusion of political bias in news coverage, the selective reporting of news stories, and the manipulation of news content to shape public opinion in a certain way in furtherance of political agenda. Political bias in news coverage may involve the positive or negative tone towards, or the particular portrayal of, political actors. It can also influence editorial decision on which news stories—and banner headlines—to publish and in which part of the newspaper they should appear, if at all. This provides the favored politician with free media mileage, either to promote their agenda or attack their opponents, and the power to control the narrative.

When the news is framed in a way that supports a particular political stance, it can generate positive coverage and public support for that position. This can make it easier for politicians to gain traction and generate political momentum for their agenda. The news could also be framed in the negative to emphasize the flaws or mistakes of political opposition. Negative news can be used to create a negative narrative around political rivals, influence public opinion, and damage their political standing. The framing of the news can be aligned with particular political agenda, help politicians shape public opinion and control the conversation around issues that are important to them. Politicians can then steer public discourse in the direction that is favorable to their goals and interests.

Politicization of the news can lead to misinformation, deception, and a disregard for reality. Instead of reporting objective facts and evidence, they can be distorted, selectively used, or even ignored. Society suffers as a whole. Trust in institutions, particularly the media, is eroded. The credibility of information is undermined, and the pursuit of truth is set back.

Politicization of the news can also exacerbate partisan divisions and polarization within society, creating an “us vs. them” mentality where political opponents are demonized or dehumanized. This undermines social cohesion and contribute to a toxic political culture that is detrimental to the well-being of individuals and communities.

It can lead to social discord, hostility, and a breakdown of civil discourse.

Politicization of the news can likewise threaten democratic values such as transparency, accountability, and fairness by distorting the democratic process through gerrymandering, voter suppression, or undermining the independence of democratic institutions. Democracy is based on the idea of a fair and inclusive system that represents the will of the people. Politicization erodes this fairness and inclusivity.

On the other hand, it can also be argued that politicization is in fact a necessity. It can be a tool to promote social justice, equality, and fairness. It can be seen as a way to advance and promote certain values, such as human rights, environmental protection, or social welfare. The politicization of news when a politician argues for a more just and compassionate society provides a platform to bring the issues of the marginalized or the oppressed to the fore.

Politicization of the news can also be seen as a means to hold those in power accountable and promote transparency in governance. Holding those in power accountable is, in fact, the avowed role of the media as the Fourth Estate. The ‘Fourth Estate’ describes the media’s role to hold those in power, particularly the government, to account while giving the public sufficient information to engage in discourse and make informed decisions (Davies, 2023). This, according to Australian Democrats senator Don Chipp, is to ‘keep the bastards honest’ (Hirst, 2013). Philippine media resonate with this concept of the press as the Fourth Estate. After being suppressed by belligerent foreign powers in succession (from the Spanish, very briefly the British, then the Americans, and subsequently the Japanese) and after being suppressed further by its own during the decades of Marcos dictatorship and 35 years later during the Duterte presidency, the Philippine media has evolved to a social institution expected to hold the government and those in power to account. In fact, Filipino journalists see themselves as truth crusaders and advocates of societal reform. They take on the disseminator and watchdog roles as more important (Balod & Hameleers, 2019), and thus, they will not hesitate to use politicization of the news if it is necessary to

hold those in power accountable and to promote transparency in governance.

Politicized news and, according to Wolton (2019), biased media are not always bad for democracy. Under the right circumstances, it may even improve voter welfare. Hershey (2020) agrees, pointing out that media bias is mostly in the eye of the beholder. Using scientific polling methods, communications scholars have shown that people perceive media bias when the media outfit does not agree with them. On the other hand, it is a cornerstone of democracy to have different perspectives at play. It is therefore more beneficial to society if there is media that presents a perspective that is different from that of the majority.

What is more dangerous than partisanship bias is the propensity of (some) news outlets to favor dramatic and sensationalized stories because these are what draws in the audience. Instead of news that inform and analyses that present different perspectives, reader attention is directed to the mundane but otherwise compelling by reason of its entertainment value. This is the real media bias, when the readers are less informed than they need to be (Hershey, 2020).

Julie Mastrine, the marketing director for a media literacy company, was quoted in Sheridan (2021) to say that “unbiased news doesn’t exist.” Indeed, complete objectivity is not possible. Bias and prejudice, which each of us have in varying degrees, can easily manifest in everything from the headline to the story itself, from use of the right words to the phrasing of certain terms, choices made on which story to write and where a story should appear. Thus, objectivity of the news is only problematic, according to Beach (2022), if it claims, expressly or impliedly, that it is objective. Tim Groeling, a communications professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, said that when people are influenced by undisclosed political bias in the news they consume, it is harmful to democratic politics. People are consistently misinformed yet are led to believe that they are well informed (Sheridan, 2021).

Broadsheets in the Philippines proclaim their objectivity as slogans that go with their masthead. The Daily Tribune says “*without fear, without favor,*” meaning that

it cannot be coerced and it cannot be influenced. The slogan for Manila Bulletin is “*the exponent of Philippine progress since 1900,*” emphasizing its long history and advocacy. The Manila Standard has none, while the Philippine Daily Inquirer has “*balanced news, fearless views.*” For the Inquirer, its news is impartial and its editorials are independent. “*Truth shall prevail,*” says the Philippine Star, implying that it is the bearer of truth, no matter how hurtful truth may be. It is therefore objective. For The Manila Times, it is “*trusted since 1898,*” emphasizing its long history and reputation. It is trusted because it is worthy of that trust.

If the results of the analysis of the politicization of banner headlines from the six broadsheets were to be used as sole basis, Manila Bulletin and The Manila Times should rank high in being true to their respective slogans. Manila Bulletin, shown to have a very small and neutral politicization, asserts itself as *the exponent of Philippine progress*. Meanwhile, despite strong politicization for The Manila Times, it never pretended to be otherwise, and instead makes a strong case for the trust it has received dating back to the colonial period.

Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that achieving complete objectivity in the press is a complex endeavor. Objectivity is a concept that can be seen from different perspectives, such as from factual accuracy of the news, the balance and fairness of presentation, transparency and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest, and others. Likewise, it has to be further acknowledged that journalists are people too, subject to their own personal biases and prejudices. But it is the duty of the journalist that these biases and prejudices, while acknowledged, are not manifested in reporting the news. “I shall not let personal motives or interests influence me in the performance of my duties,” says the fifth paragraph of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics, jointly approved by the Philippines Press Institute, the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, and the National Press Club in 1988 (Philippines

Press Institute, 2017). This should be read with the first paragraph of the Code which goes, "I shall scrupulously report and interpret the news, taking care not to suppress essential facts nor to distort the truth by omission or improper emphasis. I recognize the duty to air the other side and the duty to correct substantive errors promptly."

On the other hand, politicization of the news should be considered in its context. Simply providing media mileage for a politician while purporting to be a herald of objectivity is obviously deplorable, but politicization may be necessary to promote representation and accountability, such as in advocating for social justice or human rights. A principles-based approach to politicization of the news will provide a framework that can be used to carefully consider the competing values for and against politicization and to find a balance that aligns with broader ethical principles.

The purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments (American Press Institute, n.d.). This purpose will not be achieved if the journalist misleads, provides half-truths, and worse, employ lies. There is nothing more insidious than representing the news with objectivity when it is not. By being transparent, journalists and the media do not just mitigate this potential issue, they also empower their audience— after being provided a certain perspective, and knowing that, the public is then called upon to seek other

sources of information to their satisfaction, so they can make informed decisions, engage in discourse, and participate in the democratic process.

In the broader context of global media studies, the findings in this study have strong implications in the how the media can shape public opinion. The politicization of banner headlines frames issues in a certain way, which is important in democratic societies where an informed electorate is essential. Understanding how media politicization occurs will help in the analysis of its impact on public attitudes and beliefs.

Politicization of banner headlines can also reflect the agenda-setting power of media organizations. It highlights which issues are prioritized and emphasized in the news cycle, influencing what the public considers important. Studying politicized headlines provides insights into the media's role in shaping the public agenda and influencing policy debates.

Finally, a politicized media can contribute to polarization and political divisions within society. Understanding the prevalence of politicization in media helps researchers and policymakers anticipate its potential social and political impacts, allowing for interventions that promote a more informed and cohesive public discourse.

ORCID ID

Manuel O. Diaz, Jr.: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7441-2444>

References

- American Press Institute (n.d.). *What is the purpose of journalism?* <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/purpose-journalism/>
- Araneta, S. (2017). Duterte slams 2 'biased' media firms. *Manila Standard*. <https://www.manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/233275/duterte-slams-2-biased-media-firms.html>
- Bacilig, C. (2022). Social media, internet craze keep PH on top 2 of world list. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1589845/social-media-internet-craze-keep-ph-on-top-2-of-world-list>
- Balod, S. S., & Hameleers, M. (2019). Fighting for truth? The role perceptions of Filipino journalists in an era of mis- and disinformation. *Journalism*, 22(9). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919865109>
- BBC. (2020). ABS-CBN: Philippines' biggest broadcaster forced off air. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52548703>
- Beach, B. (2022). Journalists should strive for total objectivity. *The Daily Nebraskan*.

- https://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/counterpoint-journalists-should-strive-for-total-objectivity/article_09d8eb1c-b13a-11ec-996f-d31dc0c27387.html
- Beltran, J. (2017). The Emergence of the Philippine 'Anti-Media': The Duterte Factor. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 14(1), 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v14i1.833>
- Beltran, M. (2022). Disinformation reigns in Philippines as Marcos Jr takes top job. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/29/disinformation-reigns-in-philippines-as-marcos-jr-takes-top-job>
- Branigin, W. (1984). 'Crony Capitalism' Blamed for Economic Crisis. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/08/16/crony-capitalism-blamed-for-economic-crisis/d99e8760-087d-4d25-ad66-3d324150dc4d/>
- Buan, L. (2022). Welcome to the Marcos campaign, where journalists are blocked and boxed out. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/marcos-jr-campaign-where-journalists-blocked-boxed-out/>
- Cabico, G. K. (2020). Whatever happened to: Graft conviction of Imelda Marcos. *Philippine Star*. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/11/09/2055672/whatever-happened-to-graft-conviction-imelda-marcos>
- Chinn, S., Hart, P. S., & Soroka, S. (2020). Politicization and Polarization in Climate Change News Content, 1985-2017. *Science Communication*, 42(1), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1075547019900290>
- Chua, Y. T. (2021). Philippines. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. Manila, Philippines: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf
- Chua, Y. T. (2021). Philippines. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. Manila, Philippines: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News_Report_2022.pdf
- CNN Philippines Staff. (2020). Daily Tribune founder dies at 78. *CNN Philippines*. <http://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/1/4/daily-tribune-founder-dies.html>
- Cohen, J., Tsifti, Y., & Sheaffer, T. (2008). The influence of presumed media influence in politics: do politicians' perceptions of media power matter? *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(2), 331-344. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25167628>
- Coronel, S. (2022). The triumph of the Marcos dynasty disinformation is a warning to the US. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-triumph-of-marcos-dynasty-disinformation-is-a-warning-to-the-us>
- Corrales, N. (2016). Duterte hits media for sensationalism, bias. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/784772/duterte-hits-media-for-sensationalism-bias>
- Cunanan, C. (2017). Three decades of Manila Standard. *Manila Standard*. <https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/228971>
- Davies, K. (2023). What is the Fourth Estate and where does the term for the media come from? *The Sun*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6600872/fourth-estate-media-fourth-estate-term/>
- Diaz, M. (2021). Sentiment polarity identification in banner headlines of broadsheets in the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Media and Communication*, 5(2), 101-130. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357683577_Sentiment_Polarity_Identification_in_Banner_Headlines_of_Broadsheets_in_the_Philippines
- Diola, C. (2017). Was it an age of prosperity under Marcos? Debt, deprivation and the spoils of dictatorship. 31 Years of Amnesia. *Philippine Star*. <https://newslab.philstar.com/31-years-of-amnesia/golden-era>
- Elemia, C. (2017). Manila Times' big boss is Duterte's PR guy. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/news/2017/11/14/manila-times-big-boss-is-dutertes-pr-guy/>

- www.rappler.com/nation/manila-times-dante-ang-appointed-envoy-public-relations
- Forbes. (2004). The world's all-time most corrupt leaders. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/2004/03/25/cx_vc_corruptslide.html
- Galvez, D. (2022). Bongbong insists Jessica Soho is 'biased,' describes her as 'anti-Marcos'. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1544470/marcos-insists-jessica-soho-is-biased-as-she-is-anti-marcos>
- Hershey, M. (2020). Political bias in media doesn't threaten democracy—other, less visible biases do. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/political-bias-in-media-doesnt-threaten-democracy-other-less-visible-biases-do-144844>
- Hirst, M. (2013). Right to know: The 'nation,' the 'people' and the Fourth Estate. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/right-to-know-the-nation-the-people-and-the-fourth-estate-21253>
- Höppner, S. and Burack, C. (2020). GMF digital session: How media and politics influence each other. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://corporate.dw.com/en/european-union-general-data-protection-regulationgdpr-valid-may-25-2018/a-18265246>
- Luna, A. (2016). Biased media and biased reporting. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/97390/biased-media-and-biased-reporting>
- Magno, L. (2004). Battling media corruption in the Philippines: Profile interview: Chay Florentin Hofileña, Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 1(15), 221-225. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss15/20>
- Mazzoleni, G., & Schulz, W. (2010). "Mediatization" of politics: A challenge for democracy? *Political Communication*, 16(3), 247-261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105846099198613>
- Mendoza, G. (2019). Networked propaganda: How the Marcoses are using social media to reclaim Malacañang. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/245290-marcos-networked-propaganda-social-media/>
- Mitchell, A., Simmons, K., Matsa, K. E., & Silver, L. (2018). Publics globally want unbiased news coverage, but are divided on whether their news media deliver. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/01/11/publics-globally-want-unbiased-news-coverage-but-are-divided-on-whether-their-news-media-deliver/>
- Neumann, A. L. (2005). The Philippines: Amid troubles, a rich press tradition. *Committee to Protect Journalists*. <https://cpj.org/reports/2005/08/neumann-sidebar/>
- Pablo, M. C. (2018). Internet inaccessibility plagues "social media capital of the world." *The Asia Foundation*. <https://asiafoundation.org/2018/10/24/internet-inaccessibility-plagues-social-media-capital-of-the-world/>
- Philippine Press Institute. (2017). Journalist's Code of Ethics. *Philippine Press Institute*. <https://philpressinstitute.net/journalist-code-of-ethics/>
- Polit, D., & Beck, C. T. (2017). Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice (9th ed.). Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherlands: Wolters Kluwer.
- Quijote, T. A., Zamoras, A. D., & Ceniza, A. M. (2019). Bias detection in Philippine political news articles using Senti WordNet and inverse reinforcement model. *The International Conference on Information Technology and Digital Applications*. <http://dx.doi.org/482.10.1088/1757-899X/482/1/012036>
- Ranada, P. (2021). 'Daily Tribune' publisher is Duterte's new MECO representative. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/daily-tribune-publisher-wilfredo-fernandez-appointed-meco-representative/>
- Relativo, J. (2021). ANYARE? 'Media bias' and agenda setting in the 2022 elections. *Philippine Star*. <https://www.philstar.com/news/commentary/2021/11/29/2144592/anyare-media-bias-and-agenda-setting-2022-elections>
- Sheridan, J. (2021). Should you trust media bias charts? *Poynter*. <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/media-bias-charts/>

- literacy/2021/should-you-trust-media-bias-charts/
- Shultziner, D., & Stukalin, Y. (2021). Politicizing what's news: How partisan media bias occurs in news production. *Mass Communication and Society*, 24(1), 372-393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2020.1812083>
- Valdeavilla, D. D. R., & Pulido, M. T. R. (2019). Bias in Filipino newspapers? Newspaper sentiment analysis of the 2017 Battle of Marawi. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Internet of Things, Big Data and Security (IoTBDs 2019)* (pp. 408-413). <https://doi.org/10.5220/0007752104080413>
- Valderama, T. (2022). Biased media. *The Manila Times*. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/01/24/opinion/columns/biased-media/1830398>
- Vera Files. (2016). Philippines 2016: Manila bulletin. *Media Ownership Monitor*. <https://philippines.mom-rsf.org/en/media/detail/outlet/manila-bulletin/>
- Vera Files. (2016). Philippines 2016: Print. *Media Ownership Monitor*. <https://philippines.mom-rsf.org/en/media/print/>
- Viray, M. S. S. (2018). Get to know The Manila Times in 120 ways. *The Manila Times*. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/10/11/supplements/over-the-years/450913>
- Wolton, S. (2019). Are biased media bad for democracy? *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(3), 548-562. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45132496>
- Yu, D. G. (2011). The beginnings of the Philippine STAR. *Philippine Star*. <https://www.philstar.com/other-sections/supplements/2011/07/28/710349/beginnings-philippine-star>