

# Beyond the War on Drugs: Ongoing Atrocity Risks in the Philippines

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# Introduction

The Philippines continues to face high risks for atrocity crimes despite a significant decrease in the incidence of extra-judicial killings (EJKs) since the Marcos Jr administration took over the government in July 2022. Although drug war-related killings have declined significantly over the last three years after the incumbent government abandoned “Operation Tokhang” under Duterte’s six-year term from 2016, violence against civilians perpetrated by state agents, corrupt law enforcers, political clans, and gun-for-hire operators continue to take place across the country. Attacks against journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and environmental protection advocates also remain a major concern despite significant declines in reported violent incidents under the Marcos Jr administration. Women and children are especially vulnerable to continuing risks of atrocities in the Philippines in conflict areas, particularly those in IDP camps in Mindanao who have been displaced since the Zamboanga siege in 2013 and the Marawi siege in 2017. This includes human trafficking, sexual slavery, and sexual violence. Women journalists have also been harassed online due to their continuing coverage of Duterte’s arrest and pending trial in the ICC as well as the corruption scandals involving some legislators and government officials.

This report examines the relevant risk factors present in the Philippines, focusing on key indicators that point to the overall moderate to high level of risk for atrocity crimes in the country. However, Mindanao faces a higher level of risk especially in the run up to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) elections, which could trigger increased incidents of election-related violence. Elections that were scheduled for 13 October 2025 were postponed to no later than 31 March 2026, following the Supreme Court’s decision declaring the redistricting of parliamentary seats allocated to the Sulu province unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup> The outcome of the elections could also undermine the transitional peace process especially if the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and its political party are unwilling to accept the election results. This will also affect the completion of the decommissioning process of MILF

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<sup>1</sup> Iya Gozum, “BARMM polls postponed as SC declares districting laws unconstitutional,” Rappler, 1 October 2025, from <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/barmm-polls-delayed-supreme-court-declares-districting-laws-unconstitutional/>, accessed on 4 October 2025. The elections have been scheduled for 30 March 2026, but scepticism remains as to whether this date will hold.

forces and its allied forces, which has been stalled since July 2025 due to the freeze order by the group’s leadership due to some grievances against the government.

The following are the specific risk factors covered in this report based on five of the eight common risk factors in the *UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention*.

Risk Factor	Indicators
1. Situations of armed conflict or other forms of instability	Internal armed rebellion against the state
2. Weakness of state structures	Inadequate response to promote accountability for violations of human rights and prosecuting perpetrators of EJKs
3. Capacity to commit crimes	Existence of private armies and culture of impunity among state and non-state actors
4. Inadequate mitigating factors	Patronage politics, political dynasties, corruption, and lack of accountability
5. Triggering factors	Election-related violence

## Analysis of risk factors for 2025

### 1. Situations of armed conflicts: armed rebellions against the state

The Philippine government continues to face armed rebellions against the state, specifically with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People’s Army (CPP/NPA) and some extremist groups in Mindanao. Despite successfully negotiating a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014, which paved the way for a transitional period under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) since 2019, the precarious peace deal may be undermined by declining confidence in the government’s ability to keep its end of the bargain. Specifically, the MILF is supposed to complete the decommissioning process as part of the transition period before the BARMM elections. However, this is currently on hold following the freeze order from the group’s leadership in July 2025 due to certain grievances against the government’s failure to fulfill its obligations to compensate MILF forces who have laid down their arms. Currently, there are still over 13,000 MILF forces who have not taken part in the decommissioning process by surrendering their weapons.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn O. Arguillas, “Only 1,286 out of 26,145 decommissioned combatants are from MILF camps,” Mindanews, 25 August 2025, from <https://mindanews.com/peace-process/2025/08/only-1286-out-of-26145-decommissioned-combatants-are-from-milf-camps/>, accessed on 25 August 2025.

Meanwhile, several clashes between the MILF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) troops have taken place, despite the signing of the peace agreement. This includes an attack by rebel forces in January 2025 against soldiers who were providing security escort to UN Development Program (UNDP) mission in Mindanao;<sup>3</sup> encounters between government troops and some factions of the MILF;<sup>4</sup> and involvement of military forces in rido<sup>5</sup> conflicts among political clans or groups in BARMM areas.<sup>6</sup> Rido violence may also increase in relation to the first Bangsamoro parliamentary elections in October 2025.<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 below shows Rido violence in the Philippines from 2018 to 2024.

Figure 1: Rido events in the Philippines (2018-2024)<sup>8</sup>



The Communist Party of the Philippines/New People’s Army (CPP/NPA) is still fighting the military in the absence of peace talks under the Marcos government. In May 2017, the Duterte

<sup>3</sup> “AFP files protest over MILF attack that killed 2 soldiers,” Inquirer.net, 6 February 2025, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2031974/afp-files-protest-over-milf-attack-that-killed-2-soldiers>, accessed on 29 August 2025. See also Herbie Gomez and Ferdinandh Cabrera, “At least 4 dead, 12 hurt in Basilan ambush vs troops securing UN mission,” Rappler, 23 January 2025, from <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/basilan-ambush-troops-securing-un-mission-january-22-2025/>, accessed on 29 August 2025.; Bong Sarmiento, “Basilan ambush due to ‘lack of coordination’ —MILF-AHJAG official,” Mindanews, 23 January 2025, from <https://mindanews.com/top-stories/2025/01/basilan-clash-due-to-lack-of-coordination-milf-ahjag-official/>, accessed on 29 August 2025.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Falcatan and Ferdinandh Cabrea, “At least 7 dead as clashes between gov’t troops, MILF escalate in Basilan,” Rappler, 10 November 2022, from <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/hostilities-afp-milf-basilan-escalate-threaten-peace-process/>, accessed on 29 September 2025; Froilan Gallardo and Ferdinandh Cabrera, “MILF frees 39 soldiers in Lanao del Sur after 24 hours,” Rappler, 8 February 2023, from <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/tension-grips-lanao-del-sur-milf-holds-soldiers-february-2023/>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Rido conflict is between clans usually carried out through unlawful acts such as kidnapping for ransom, extra-judicial killings, and other violent means to exact revenge for wrongdoing or settle debts.

<sup>6</sup> See “Southern Philippines: Making Peace Stick in the Bangsamoro,” International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 331 (May 2023), from <https://crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/331-bangsamoro-making-peace-stick.pdf>, accessed on 29 August 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Tomas Buenaventura, “Clan violence in Southern Philippines: Rido threatens elections and peace in Mindanao,” ACLED, 9 May 2025, from <https://acleddata.com/report/clan-violence-southern-philippines-rido-threatens-elections-and-peace-bangsamoro>, accessed on 3 September 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

administration abandoned peace talks with the communist armed group after clashes between government troops and NPA rebels early in February 2017 that resulted in deaths of several AFP soldiers. In November 2023, the Philippine government signed the Oslo Communique with the CPP/NPA/NDF where they agreed to a “principled and peaceful resolution of the armed conflict”, which was supposed to lead to the resumption of peace talks in 2024.<sup>9</sup> However, this did not happen even after the government and the communist rebels agreed in November 2024 to resume peace talks.

With the Marcos government’s declaration in July 2025 that the armed insurgency in the country has ended, it is unlikely that there will be a resumption of peace talks with the CPP/NPA/NDF any time soon.<sup>10</sup> This came on the heels of a declaration made by national security officials in January and May 2025 that the threat of communist insurgency in the Philippines has become negligible given the successful efforts by the military and the National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) in dismantling and reducing the number of communist fronts.<sup>11</sup> This is also based on the assertion of the AFP that the CPP/NPA has only one guerrilla front left as of December 2024.<sup>12</sup>

Despite such claims, the communist insurgents are likely to continue with their armed rebellion against the government. In late July 2025, the AFP conducted several offensive operations against CPP/NPA rebels in Masbate province that resulted in nine guerrillas killed. The military claimed that this was part of its final push against the weakening communist guerrilla force in the island province. The AFP estimates that there are less than 900 communist rebel forces who are mostly operating in the eastern rural regions of the Philippines, which is down from 56,000 insurgent forces at its peak.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, armed insurgency conflicts in the Philippines have resulted in over 180 fatalities in the past year, which occurred mainly in conflict areas in Mindanao and central Visayas region. (See Figure 2 below). Although the Philippines made significant progress in reducing involvement of children in armed conflict in recent years, recruitment of child soldiers by the

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<sup>9</sup> Betheena Unite, “Peace talks with CPP-NPA-NDFP a restart, not a resumption — Galvez,” Manila Bulletin, 28 November 2023, from <https://mb.com.ph/2023/11/28/ph-gov-t-ndf-deal-to-end-armed-conflict-signals-restart-not-resumption-of-peace-talks-galvez-1>, accessed on 29 August 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Laqui, “SONA: Marcos declares end of guerrilla groups, vows sustained peace efforts,” Philstar.com, 28 July 2025, from <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/07/28/2461398/sona-2025-marcos-declares-end-guerrilla-groups-vows-sustained-peace-efforts>, accessed on 29 August 2025.

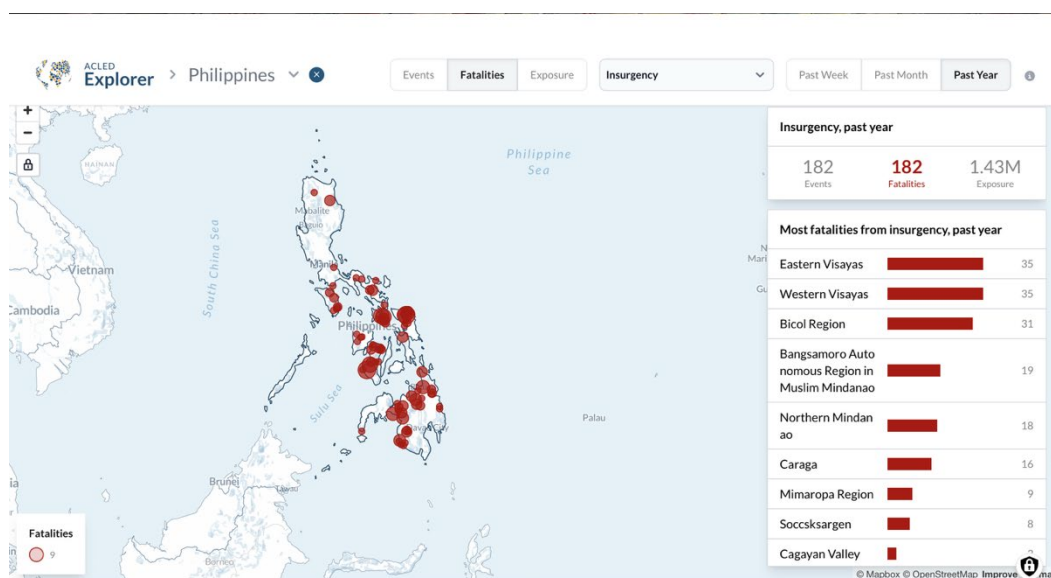
<sup>11</sup> Victor Reyes, “Año sees end to communist insurgency,” Malaya Business Insight, 5 May 2025, from <https://malaya.com.ph/news/national-news/ano-sees-end-to-communist-insurgency/>, accessed on 29 August 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Associated Press, “Philippine troops kills seven communist rebels in yet another flare-up of decades-long insurgency,” The Toronto Star, 27 July 2025, from [https://www.thestar.com/news/world/asia/philippine-troops-kill-7-communist-rebels-in-latest-flare-up-of-decades-long-insurgency/article\\_73def126-33ac-55d7-a4c7-0b148996f064.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/world/asia/philippine-troops-kill-7-communist-rebels-in-latest-flare-up-of-decades-long-insurgency/article_73def126-33ac-55d7-a4c7-0b148996f064.html), accessed on 29 August 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

NPA rebels accounted for 40 percent and 41 percent in 2022 and 2024, respectively. The remaining violations during this period were committed by other groups, including the Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute group and the AFP, which were repeat offenders.<sup>14</sup> In 2024, the most common violations include killing and maiming children (43 percent); recruitment (38 percent); and attacks in schools (12 percent). Sexual misconduct, abductions, and denial of humanitarian access altogether made up the remaining 7 percent of the violations.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 2: Insurgency-Related Fatalities in the Philippines<sup>16</sup>



As of 23 July 2025, there are over 121,500 people internally displaced in Mindanao, majority of whom are related to armed conflict. Specifically, over 18,000 IDPs were due to conflict in Central Mindanao, and another 80,000 continue to be displaced since the Marawi siege in 2017. Another 3,600 remain displaced since the Zamboanga siege in 2013.<sup>17</sup> Majority of IDPs in Mindanao are women and children, who are vulnerable to human trafficking. Specifically in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (formerly ARMM), predatory traffickers, which include relatives or family members of victims, view them as “resource” for generating capital through recruitment for overseas work as domestic helpers or worse as sex slaves.<sup>18</sup> Women in conflict areas of Mindanao also take on new roles as breadwinners

<sup>14</sup> Seth Christopher, “Child Soldiers in the Philippines,” The Borgen Report, 21 July 2025, from <https://borgenproject.org/child-soldiers-in-the-philippines/>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Map and data from ACLED as of 4 September 2025 from <https://acleddata.com/country/philippines>, accessed on 4 September 2025.

<sup>17</sup> See “Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot,” OCHA, 23 July 2025, from <https://www.unocha.org/attachments/5c117d2d-ba53-452c-b6d7-682af97a90c1/250723-OCHA-PHL-Mindanao-Displacement-Snapshot.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>18</sup> Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, “Gender and Livelihoods Among Internally Displaced in Mindanao, Philippines,” Brookings, 11 July 2013, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gender-and-livelihoods-among-internally-displaced-persons-in-mindanao-philippines/>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

especially if the men are recruited to join armed groups or unable to work because of restricted mobility because of rido or clan conflicts where they become targets of revenge.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Record of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law

The Philippines has a record of serious violations of international human rights law, which became more pronounced under the Duterte administration's drug war campaign that resulted in at least 6,000 people killed (per government data) but could be as high as over 30,000 (according to estimates by human rights organisations). The 30,000 individuals include those who were killed in vigilante-style street executions. In fact, based on the 2017 accomplishment report of the Office of the President, there were 20,000 drug-related deaths in the first 17 months of the Duterte administration. Another government document also indicated that some of the victims were from low-paying or low-skilled occupation, such as tricycle drivers, construction workers, street vendors, farmers, jeepney drivers, garbage collectors, as well as those who were jobless.<sup>20</sup> Some 150 children were also killed during Duterte's drug war campaign, according to child rights organisations in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup>

Violence against women were also committed by police officers during Duterte administration's drug war. Specifically, women sex workers were "subjected to lewd, dehumanizing sexual acts in exchange for the life of or release of their partners from jail, as well as the women's freedom." Also referred to as "palit katawan" (or body ransom), this practice is used by police officers to coerce women to have sex with them. During the drug war campaign, police officers used their knowledge of poor, drug-dependent women sex workers as leverage to force them into having sex in exchange for not being arrested for violating domestic laws against prostitution.<sup>22</sup>

Under the Marcos government, drug war operations continue but the number of deaths has significantly declined (see table below). In November 2024, the Department of Justice formed a task force to investigate the alleged extra-judicial killings (EJKs) that were committed under the Duterte administration. Specifically, its mandate included conducting investigations, case-

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<sup>19</sup> See Leslie Dwyer and Ruffa Cagoco-Guiam, "Gender and Conflict in Mindanao," The Asia Foundation, 2012, from <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Gender%20and%20Conflict%20in%20Mindanao.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Kurt dela Peña, "Duterte drug war: Thousands killed, menace stayed alive," Inquirer.net, 27 March 2025, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2047552/duterte-drug-war-thousands-killed-menace-stayed-alive>, accessed on 4 October 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Aric John CSu Cua, "'Children killed during drug war not collateral damage'," Manila Times, 29 March 2025, from <https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/29/news/national/children-killed-during-drug-war-not-collateral-damage/2082284>, accessed on 4 October 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Ann Manahan, Jean Enriquez, and Janica Rosales, "Struggling Women in the Face of Tokhang: A Feminist Action Research on the Women Victim-Survivors of Duterte's Drug War in Bulacan," Dahas (undated), from <https://dahas.upd.edu.ph/violence-against-women-in-the-time-of-tokhang/>, accessed on 4 October 2025.

build up, and filing of charges against perpetrators and others involved in EJKs. It was also to coordinate with both the House of Representatives and Senate committees that were conducting hearings on Duterte’s drug war operations.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 3: Number of Drug-Related Killings under Marcos Jr Govt<sup>24</sup>



In December 2024, the House of Representatives Quad Committee submitted its progress report before the plenary following 13 hearings on the drug war-related EJKs under the Duterte administration. Specifically, the report recommended the filing of crimes against humanity charges against former President Duterte, Senators Christopher Go (his former aide) and Ronald dela Rosa (his former PNP chief), and other policemen involved in the EJKs under the country’s law against violation of international humanitarian law, genocide, and crimes against humanity. It also cited Duterte’s statements during the hearings where he admitted: 1) taking full responsibility for the bloody drug war; 2) acknowledging the existence of the Davao Death Squad; and 3) using the Davao reward system for police officers involved in EJKs as template in the nation-wide drug war during his administration. Duterte also admitted that he used excess election campaign funds to finance the reward system. He also told police officers to provoke drug suspects to resist arrest to justify killing them. Among other things, the report recommended the filing of bills against EJKs, in which it will be classified as a heinous crime; the creation of an inter-agency body that will investigate EJKs and an independent Internal

<sup>23</sup> Jane Bautista, “DOJ creates task force to probe EJKs, file cases,” Inquirer.net, 7 November 2024, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2002013/doj-creates-task-force-to-probe-ejks-file-cases>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Infographic from UP Third World Studies Centre Facebook page (UP Twsc), accessed on 3 September 2025.

Affairs body within the PNP; and amendment to the Witness Protection Act of 1998. It also recommended a second revival of the death penalty (after it was enacted in 1993 and abolished again in 2006), even though it is prohibited under the 1987 Constitution.<sup>25</sup> In July 2025, leaders of the House Quad Committee refiled the Anti-EJK bill after the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, highlighting that EJK is a heinous crime and a serious threat to democracy and human rights.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, EJKs perpetrated against journalists continue in the Philippines despite a slight improvement in its ranking in the Global Impunity Index as of October 2024. Specifically, the country placed 9<sup>th</sup> with 18 unresolved murders of media practitioners killed in direct connection with their work.<sup>27</sup> Although there were no recorded killings of journalists in 2024, impunity persists in the country despite improvements under the Marcos administration.<sup>28</sup> As of end of August 2025, three media practitioners were killed in the Philippines—a veteran journalist and publisher who was gunned down at his home in April,<sup>29</sup> a former radio broadcaster and activist transwoman who was killed in June in General Santos City in Mindanao,<sup>30</sup> and a radio journalist in Surigao del Sur also in Mindanao who was killed in July on his way home after his morning radio program.<sup>31</sup> Since 1986, a total of over 170 journalists have been killed in the Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

Despite improvement in the country's Global Impunity Index ranking in 2024 under the Marcos administration, attacks against media workers continue. For example, between 1 July 2022 to 30 April 2025, there were 184 cases of attacks on media companies, websites, and

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<sup>25</sup> Paige Javier, "House recommends criminal raps vs ex-President Duterte, Bato, Go, over alleged EJKs," ABS-CBN News, 19 December 2024, from <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2024/12/18/quad-comm-recommends-criminal-raps-vs-ex-president-duterte-bato-go-over-alleged-ejks-1847>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Abegail Esquierda, "Quadcom revives anti-EJK bill ahead of 20<sup>th</sup> Congress," Daily Tribune, 9 July 2025, from <https://tribune.net.ph/2025/07/09/quadcom-revives-anti-ejk-bill-ahead-of-20th-congress>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Gillian Villanueva, "PH 9<sup>th</sup> in Global Impunity Index; journos not impressed," Inquirer.net, 4 November 2024, from <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/254253/ph-9th-in-global-impunity-index-journos-not-impressed>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Mong Palatino, "No Filipino Journalist Killed in 2024, but Impunity Persists," The Diplomat, 7 March 2025, from <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/no-filipino-journalist-killed-in-2024-but-impunity-persists/>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>29</sup> "Veteran publisher Juan Dayang shot and killed in the Philippines," CPJ, 2 May 2025, from <https://cpj.org/2025/05/veteran-publisher-juan-dayang-shot-and-killed-in-the-philippines/>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>30</sup> "They are still killing journalists," Inquirer.net, 25 July 2025, from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/184913/they-are-still-killing-journalists>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>31</sup> "Radio journalist killed in southern Philippines," Reuters, 21 July 2025, from <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/radio-journalist-killed-southern-philippines-2025-07-21/>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility, "The State of Media Freedom in the Philippines 2025," PCIJ, 3 May 2025, from <https://pcij.org/2025/05/03/cmfr-state-of-media-freedom-in-the-philippines-2025/>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

practitioners, which exceeded the 128 recorded under Duterte, or an increase of 44 percent.<sup>33</sup> These attacks involved intimidation such as “red-tagging” (accusing them of being leftist or communist sympathisers) and surveillance; harassment through verbal, physical, or online abuse; cyber attacks on media organisations, cyber libel charges, and even death threats. Six journalists were arrested during this period and some incidents involved shootings and bombing of a journalist’s property.<sup>34</sup>

In the aftermath of Duterte’s arrest and surrender to the ICC, women journalists in the Philippines were harassed online for covering the issue. Specifically, the International Association of Women in Radio and Television-Philippines (IAWRTV-Philippines) condemned the wave of harassment through the use of fake news and misinformation, which led to hateful and misogynistic attacks in social media against several women journalists.<sup>35</sup> The group also asserted that women journalists in the Philippines are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and politically motivated attacks, including surveillance, doxing,<sup>36</sup> “red-tagging”, and detention.<sup>37</sup>

The Philippines is also a dangerous place for farmers, indigenous peoples, and land rights activists. In 2024, there were six killings related to land conflicts in the country, which resulted in nine victims. Globally, the Philippines ranked second after Mexico, as it recorded five cases of killings that resulted in 18 victims.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, it also ranked as the worst country in Asia for killings of environmental defenders based on the 2023 Global Witness Report on murder and enforced disappearances of 17 activists in the Philippines that year. Accordingly, more environmental defenders have been killed in the country than anywhere else in the region over the past 12 years.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See Editha Caduaya, “Women journalists harassed over ICC coverage, media group sounds alarm,” *Newsline Philippines*, 23 March 2025, from <https://newsline.ph/women-journalists-harassed-over-icc-coverage-media-group-sounds-alarm/>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>36</sup> See “Philippines: Women Press Freedom Condemns Doxing of Journalist Menzie Montes,” *Women Press Freedom*, 19 November 2024, from <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/alerts/philippines-women-press-freedom-condemns-doxing-of-journalist-menzie-montes>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Sai Gomez and Dominic Gutoman, “In the Philippines, women journalists face sexual harassment and politically-motivated attacks,” *Hiyaw.org*, 29 January 2024, from <https://hiyaw.org/in-the-philippines-women-journalists-face-sexual-harassment-politically-motivated-attacks/>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>38</sup> “Philippines: Philippines is the most dangerous country in Asia for farmers, Indigenous peoples, and land activists, Malaysia-based PAN Asia Pacific says,” *Business & Human Rights Resource*, 17 August 2025, from <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/philippines-philippines-is-the-most-dangerous-country-in-asia-for-farmers-indigenous-peoples-and-land-activists-malaysia-based-pan-asia-pacific-says-ahead-of-international-humanitarian-law-regional-conference/>, accessed on 31 August 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Carlos H. Conde, “Philippines Worst in Asia for Killing of Environmental Defenders,” *Human Rights Watch*, 12 September 2024, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/12/philippines-worst-asia-killings-environmental-defenders>, accessed on 31 August 2025.

### 3. Weaknesses of state structures: accountability for EJKs

Another major risk factor in the Philippines is the weakness of state structures, specifically in pursuing accountability for crimes committed by law enforcement personnel. This is especially true in prosecuting state agents involved in EJKs before and after the Duterte administration's drug war campaign for six years, as well as state agents and other perpetrators involved in the deaths of journalists, activists, and environmental defenders. Two strategies used by the state to deny the existence of EJKs in the country are "excuse strategy" (i.e., the government has no control over the killings and denies they are state-sponsored EJK) and "justification strategy" (i.e., the illegitimate killing is actually legitimate as it conforms to social norms).<sup>40</sup> The "excuse strategy" has resulted in unsolved EJKs due to lack of investigations by the government. Where investigations were made, about 57 percent of perpetrators remain unidentified, while 67 percent of perpetrators identified were state agents (i.e., police officers, military, or militia members).<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the state "justifies" the killing of alleged suspects if they are members of left-leaning or communist sympathising groups (also known as red-tagging), or are involved in illegal drug use or trade who resisted arrests during drug war operations.<sup>42</sup> The US State Department's 2024 Human Rights Report on the Philippines noted that although the number of EJKs involving police officers and other state agents have declined, the overall human rights situation in the country has not changed in a clear systemic and sustainable way.<sup>43</sup>

Despite its earlier declaration that it will not cooperate with the ICC in its investigation of drug war EJKs under Duterte, the Marcos government arrested and turned over the former president in The Hague after it received a notice from the Interpol based on a warrant of arrest issued by the international court. Supporters of the Duterte clan, including his allies in the Senate, denounced what they framed as the unlawful arrest and surrender of the country's sovereignty to the international court. Senator Imee Marcos, a Duterte ally and sister of the incumbent president, conducted a hearing in the foreign relations committee related to the arrest of Duterte. DOJ Secretary Crispin Remulla testified during the hearing that the government had to comply with the Interpol's request for the arrest of Duterte as the country is also a member of the international police network. He did not claim that the ICC still has jurisdiction over the Philippines but reasoned that the immediate surrender of Duterte was the

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<sup>40</sup> Jon Fernquest, "State Killing, Denial, and Cycles of Violence in the Philippines," *Philippines Sociological Review*, Vol. 66 Special Issue (2018), pp. 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Pia Lee-Brago, "No change in Philippines human rights situation—US Report," *Philstar*, 25 August 2025, from <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/08/15/2465528/no-change-philippines-human-rights-situation-us-report>, accessed on 1 September 2025. See also "2024 Country Reports on Human Rights—Philippines," State Department, from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/philippines/>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

only option for the government as the Philippines is no longer a state party to the Rome Treaty. If the country did not withdraw from the ICC, Duterte's arrest should have been authorised by a Philippine court. He argued that the victims had no choice but to pursue justice through the ICC given certain weaknesses in the Philippines judicial system, especially in prosecuting law enforcers and other perpetrators of EJKs during the Duterte administration. Specifically, he said that there were no police reports based on direct evidence, such as ballistic reports, that would help in filing of charges against police officers who were allegedly involved in EJKs.<sup>44</sup> Erroneous death certificates of victims also showed natural causes of death (e.g., heart attack, bronchopneumonia, etc) even though they had bullet holes in their head or other parts of their bodies.<sup>45</sup> The DOJ chief also said that police officers intimidated prosecutors during the Duterte administration, which effectively constrained them from conducting investigations into alleged EJKs committed during drug war operations.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the Philippines' domestic law against violations of international humanitarian law, genocide, and crimes against humanity allows for investigation and prosecution of these crimes in international courts if they are already in progress. Specifically, Article 17 of Republic Act 9851 states that

In the interest of justice, the relevant Philippine authorities may dispense with the investigation or prosecution of a crime punishable under this Act if another court or international tribunal is already conducting the investigation or undertaking the prosecution of such crime. Instead, the authorities may surrender or extradite suspected or accused persons in the Philippines to the appropriate international court, if any, or to another State pursuant to the applicable extradition laws and treaties.<sup>47</sup>

Duterte's arrest and surrender to the ICC further polarised voters in the Philippines in the run up to the May 2025 elections. Diehard supporters of the former president used social media to attack the ICC and its pretrial chamber judges and to also spread fake news. Specifically,

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<sup>44</sup> Dhel Nazario, "Drug war EJK cases met with lack of police records, proper evidence—DOJ chief," Manila Bulletin, 20 March 2025, from <https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/20/drug-war-ejk-cases-met-with-lack-of-police-records-proper-evidence-doj-chief>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Adrian Ayalin, "Gunshot wound, not bronchopneumonia: CA corrects death certificate of drug war victims," ABS-CBN News, 5 December 2022, from <https://www.abs-cbn.com/spotlight/12/05/22/ca-corrects-death-certificate-of-drug-war-victim>, accessed on 30 August 2025. See also Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism, "Duterte's drug war: Lies and death certificates," Rappler, 29 May 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/duterte-drug-war-lies-death-certificates-extrajudicial-killings/>, accessed on 30 August 2025.

<sup>46</sup> Dhel Nazario, "Drug war EJK cases met with lack of police records, proper evidence—DOJ chief," Manila Bulletin, 20 March 2025, *ibid*.

<sup>47</sup> See Republic Act 9851 "An Act Defining And Penalizing Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide And Other Crimes Against Humanity, Organizing Jurisdiction, Designating Special Courts, And For Related Purposes," Article 17, from [https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2009/ra\\_9851\\_2009.html](https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2009/ra_9851_2009.html), accessed on 31 October 2025.

they echoed the claims of some politicians allied with the Duterte clan that the ICC had no jurisdiction over him as the country withdrew from the Rome Treaty in 2019. Some overseas Filipino workers based in Europe staged demonstrations in The Hague to show support for Duterte, which were live-streamed or recorded using social media as part of election campaign material to convince the public to support candidates endorsed by the clan.

However, public opinion survey in April indicate that 62 percent of Filipinos support the arrest and surrender of Duterte to the ICC to stand trial for his drug war-related EJKs.<sup>48</sup> Fifty-two percent of respondents also agreed that he should stand trial for crimes against humanity. Also, 61 percent agreed that co-perpetrators should also stand trial in the ICC and over 66 percent were in favour of the Marcos administration to give priority to investigation and prosecution of police officers involved in the drug war-related killings under Duterte.<sup>49</sup>

Duterte's arrest was viewed by his supporters as part of the government's efforts in neutralising Vice President Sara Duterte's prospects for winning in the 2028 presidential elections. The arrest came in the aftermath of an impeachment complaint filed against her in February over abuse and misuse of confidential funds. Although the Supreme Court already declared the impeachment complaint null and void, a new impeachment complaint that may be filed by the lower house of Congress against her in 2026 could be used by Duterte supporters in promoting their narrative of political persecution. This could then increase the risk of political polarisation and election-related violence in the run-up to the Philippine elections in 2028. Some public opinion polls put Sara Duterte as one of the top choices for president together with the former aide of the elder Duterte, Senator Christopher Go.<sup>50</sup> However, overall support for the Duterte clan dropped significantly in a recent survey after the May 2025 elections. Specifically, there was an 11-point drop in the August survey to 29 percent from April 2025. In Mindanao, support for the Dutertes declined to 59 percent in August compared to 77 percent in April.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, there was a slight increase among voters who identify as independents, which went up to 36 percent in the August survey compared to the April survey.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "6 in 10 Filipinos back Duterte trial at ICC—poll," ABS-CBN News, 11 April 2025, from <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/4/11/6-in-10-filipinos-back-duterte-trial-at-icc-poll-1500>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>49</sup> "6 in 10 Pinoys believe that Rody must face charges before the ICC—survey," Manila Standard, 12 April 2025, from <https://manilastandard.net/news/314578960/6-in-10-pinoys-believe-rody-must-face-charges-before-icc-survey.html>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>50</sup> John Patrick Magno Ranara, "Sara Duterte, Bong Go dominate pre-election polls for 2028—survey," Philstar, 13 August 2025, from <https://philstarlife.com/living/465068-sara-duterte-bong-top-choice-president-vice-president-2028>, accessed on 30 September 2025.

<sup>51</sup> John Patrick Magno Ranara, "Support for Duterte family drops; Marcos sees increase—survey," Philstar, 16 September 2025, from <https://philstarlife.com/news-and-views/954347-support-for-duterte-family-declines-survey>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. Capacity to commit atrocity crimes: private armies and culture of impunity

The Philippines faces high risks for atrocity crimes due to persistence of the culture of impunity among state and non-state actors, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and inadequate efforts of the state to address root causes of conflicts especially in poverty-stricken areas of the country. Families or clans continue to dominate national and local politics, some of whom are involved in rent-seeking, corruption, and political violence. Using private armies or engaging the services of corrupt police or military officers, some political dynasties are involved in political violence during elections, illicit activities (e.g., drug trafficking, human trafficking, gambling), and corruption using government resources. Specifically, there are over 20 private armies in the country, most of which are based in Mindanao. In July 2024, the presidential peace adviser claimed that the government has dismantled 16 private armies and recovered 100 firearms. Political clans and warlords utilise these private armies in conflict areas of the country especially during elections to intimidate or harass political rivals and their supporters, as well as in land conflicts.<sup>53</sup>

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Philippines remains a major problem for the government's efforts in preventing the upsurge of violence and deadly conflicts, including disarming private armies and warlords. Despite the PHP 224 million (USD 3.92 million) aid provided by the Japanese government in 2022 to create a monitoring system to manage and reduce the proliferation of privately owned small arms in the BARMM area, the use of illegal or unlicensed firearms contributed to violence in the region in the run up to the 2025 elections. In 2024, there were some 27,000 loose firearms in the BARMM but security forces in the region confiscated a low number of illicit weapons.<sup>54</sup> In the first two months of 2025, only 300 weapons were surrendered and seized by authorities.<sup>55</sup> It is estimated that there are more than 545,000 loose firearms in the country due to revoked licenses on top of about 420,000 unregistered firearms used by civilian police aides who take part in various anti-crime operations.<sup>56</sup> The security agencies of the government have at least 234,000 captured or seized firearms as of 2024 that have not been decommissioned or destroyed. In the absence of a national inventory and storage system, these could easily recirculate through pilferage and resale in the black market.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Katrina Domingo, "Gov't working to dismantle 23 private armies ahead of 2025 elections—Galvez," ABS-CBN News, 3 July 2024, from <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/7/3/gov-t-working-to-dismantle-23-private-armies-ahead-of-2025-elections-galvez-1330>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Ed Quitoriano, "Curbing the proliferation of illegal firearms," Inquirer.net, 31 March 2025, from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/182021/curbing-the-proliferation-of-illegal-firearms>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Inadequate mitigating factors: patronage politics, corruption, lack of accountability

Inadequate mitigating factors to counter negative impacts of political clan domination and patronage politics is another risk factor for atrocities in the Philippines. Specifically, they worsen the level of corruption, undermine the rule of law, good governance, and accountability in the country. Although the 1987 Constitution banned political dynasties in the country and mandated the legislature to pass an anti-dynasty law, this has not happened as political clans still dominate the Philippine Congress. Over 70 percent of elected officials in the country come from political clans or families across generations.<sup>58</sup> Political dynasties have sustained themselves in power by having family members elected in national and local government positions. In the lower house of Congress, 142 representatives are from political dynasties, which is more than half of the 253 districts across the country.<sup>59</sup> Some of these political clans have also set up their own party-list claiming advocacy for marginalised sectors, thereby undermining the constitution's purpose in creating space for proportional representation of marginalised groups. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress, 36 out of 54 party-list groups have at least one nominee from a political clan.<sup>60</sup> In the May 2025 elections, more than half or 55.3 percent of the 156 party-list groups had ties to political clans, business corporations, the security sector, questionable advocacies, as well as those linked corruption cases.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, political clans also won gubernatorial positions in 71 of 82 provinces.<sup>62</sup>

The rule of political dynasties in the Philippines may also account for the uneven socio-economic development across the country. The most developed areas are in the capital region of Metro Manila and the rest of Luzon Island, while other regions like those in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao trail behind. A study published in 2022 argued that political dynasties worsen poverty in resource-rich provinces outside of Luzon but has no impact in the main island due to competitive business environment, economic activity, good governance, and civil

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<sup>58</sup> Karylle Castro, "The Ruling Family: How Political Dynasties Are Destroying Democracy in the Philippines," Democratic Erosion Consortium, 1 May 2025, from <https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/05/01/the-ruling-family-how-political-dynasties-are-destroying-democracy-in-the-philippines/>, accessed on 3 September 2025.

<sup>59</sup> Guinevere Latoza and Maujerie Miranda, "8 in every 10 district reps belong to dynasties. More than half are reelectionists in 2025," (First of two parts), PCIJ, 26 October 2024, from <https://pcij.org/2024/10/26/lower-house-district-representatives-political-dynasties-reelection/>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

<sup>60</sup> Aaron John Baluis, Leanne Louise Isip, and Carmela S. Fonbuena, "Political dynasties also swarm the party-list election," PCIJ, 4 December 2024, from <https://pcij.org/2024/12/04/political-dynasties-also-swarm-the-party-list-elections/>, accessed on 3 September 2025.

<sup>61</sup> Dominique Nicole Flores, "For the people? Political dynasties, big business dominate party-list system in 2025 polls," Philstar, 13 February 2025, from <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/02/13/2421282/people-political-dynasties-big-business-dominate-party-list-system-2025-polls>, accessed on 3 September 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Guinevere Latoza, "12 dynasties lose gubernatorial races, but 71 of 82 provinces still led by political clans," PCIJ, 22 May 2025, from <https://pcij.org/2025/05/22/philippines-governors-political-dynasties-election-result/>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

society participation.<sup>63</sup> It pointed to the difference between dynastic politicians in Luzon (who behave like stationary bandits who can “share economic gains with a wider network”) and those in non-Luzon provinces (where prevalence of instability and rich natural resources present opportunities for politicians to behave like “roving bandits who merely extract wealth and power.”)<sup>64</sup>

Political dynasties hinder democratic consolidation in the country as they weaken platform-based electoral competition, resist political and economic reforms, enable corruption, and undermine the rule of law and accountability. With control of both the executive and legislative institutions, political clans could then undermine the principle of checks and balance between the two branches, which then contribute to persistence of graft and corruption. For example, the recent exposé made by President Marcos about incomplete or ghost flood control projects amounting to PHP 308 billion (USD 5.4 billion) of government funds involved some legislators and corrupt public works officials who were allegedly conspiring with construction companies for kickbacks. The funds for these projects were reallocated from other government departments (such as health services and education) through undisclosed insertions in the bicameral budget deliberations by legislators.<sup>65</sup> A recent investigation by the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) revealed that several senators allegedly received campaign donations from some government contractors who were involved in the controversial flood control projects. This has raised concerns over conflicts of interests and lack of transparency in election financing.<sup>66</sup>

During hearings in the Philippine Senate’s Blue Ribbon Committee, some government officials of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) admitted to participating in the corrupt practices including delivery of flood control project kickbacks to some legislators. They also acknowledged engaging in money laundering activities using kickbacks from flood control projects by gambling in local casinos using fake identification cards (as government employees are banned from entering and playing in casinos).<sup>67</sup> Ironically, some of the district representatives allegedly involved in the controversy over ghost flood control projects

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<sup>63</sup> Ronald U. Mendoza, Jurel K. Yap, Gabrielle Ann S. Mendoza, Leonardo Jaminola III, and Erica Celine Yu, “Political dynasties, business, and poverty in the Philippines,” *Journal of Government and Economics*, Volume 7, Autumn 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jge.2022.100051>, accessed on 3 September 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Jim Gomez, “Philippine president and Congress investigate alleged corruption in flood control projects,” *Associated Press*, 2 September 2025, from <https://apnews.com/article/philippines-flood-control-corruption-investigation-22e4c3eab4b8ef0880b625e17e290cce>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

<sup>66</sup> “Senators Escudero, Villanueva Linked to Donations from Government Contractors,” *Newsfeed*, 29 August 2025, from <https://newsfeed.ph/news/senators-escudero-villanueva-linked-to-donations-from-government-contractors/>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

<sup>67</sup> See Jean Manglapus, “DPWH engineers blew P300 million in casinos, says Lacson,” *Philstar*, 2 September 2025, from <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/09/02/2469907/dpwh-engineers-blew-over-p300-million-casinos-says-lacson>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

supported the impeachment complaint against Vice President Sara Duterte in February 2025 over bribery, graft and corruption, and misuse of confidential funds when she was still the secretary of education. While the Supreme Court declared the impeachment complaint as null and void *ab initio* as it violated the constitution's limit of filing only one impeachment complaint per year, the high tribunal did not exonerate her of the charges. It is likely that the lower house of Congress will refile the complaint in February 2026. Duterte herself may also face criminal charges in the Ombudsman's office alleged crimes she committed as education secretary.

Apart from corruption in the use of public funds, political clans have also engaged in EJKs using private armies to intimidate or eliminate political rivals. The most horrific example of this is the Maguindanao Massacre of November 2009 perpetrated by the Ampatuan clan that resulted in the murder of 58 people, including 32 journalists. The heinous crime aimed at ensuring their continuing monopoly of political power in the province. This incident led to the signing of the Philippines' domestic law against genocide and crimes against humanity (Republic Act 9851) by President Arroyo at the end of 2009. Although some of the Ampatuan family members were convicted, other members of the clan were able to return to politics. In 2023, Governor Degamo of Negros Oriental in central Philippines was killed allegedly by a rival political clan of a sitting member of the House of Representatives, Arnolfo Teves. The legislator was expelled from the chamber after a long absence without leave even as he sought political asylum in Timor-Leste. He was extradited back to the Philippines in March 2025 and is now facing criminal charges for the murder of Governor Degamo along with eleven other suspects. In 2019, Teves was also implicated in the murder of three people in the province and for violations of Philippine guns and explosives law after law enforcers found assault weapons and ammunition in his family's residential compound.<sup>68</sup> His brother, who ran for governor in the same province in the May 2025 elections, was implicated in the murder of Governor Degamo.<sup>69</sup>

Corruption in the Philippines is also linked to the proliferation of cybercrime hubs, online gambling, and human trafficking. Specifically, in the first half of 2025, the Philippine National Police reported that more than 5,000 people were arrested in connection with online scams, identity theft, and hacking of financial accounts through the fraudulent use of unregistered SIM cards.<sup>70</sup> Many of those arrested were former employees of online gambling sites in the Philippines, which were closed down by the government.<sup>71</sup> In January 2025, the Philippines

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<sup>68</sup> Jane Bautista, "Teves brother implicated in Degamo murder," *Inquirer.net*, 18 February 2025, from <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2035528/teves-brother-implicated-in-degamo-murder>, accessed on 2 September 2025.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Sherilyn Untalan, "Over 5,000 arrested for cyber crimes in first half of 2025, says PNP," *GMA News*, 26 June 2025, from <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/950636/over-5-000-arrested-for-cybercrimes-in-1st-half-of-2025-says-pnp/story/>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

arrested some 400 foreigners engaged in cybercrime activities in the country, many of whom were Chinese nationals who registered as online gambling operators.<sup>72</sup> In June, an additional 89 foreigners were deported from the Philippines for cyber crime and online fraud activities, which were composed of 77 Vietnamese and 12 Korean nationals.<sup>73</sup> Philippine nationals have also been victims of human trafficking in cyber crime hubs in Southeast Asia, notably in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand.<sup>74</sup> Many of the victims were recruited online through social media platforms and promised high salaries.

In a recent report by the US State Department, the Philippine government is considered as meeting the minimum standards for elimination of human trafficking and allowed it to remain in Tier 1. Specifically, it showed “serious and sustained efforts in investigating, prosecuting, and convicting more human traffickers.” This includes convicting “complicit officials and sentencing majority of convicted traffickers to significant prison terms”; passing legislation that regulates fishing recruitment agencies and protect fishers; and “taking steps to disrupt industrial-scale human trafficking in online scam operations, including banning the Philippine Online Gambling Operations (POGO) licenses, which were used as pretext for these online scam operations.”<sup>75</sup> However, the same report noted that the Philippine government did not identify the majority of the victims of human trafficking in online scam operations despite widespread reporting indicating that these individuals faced conditions related to human trafficking. In particular, the government failed to adopt consistent and adequate screening measures among trafficking victims of online scam operations in the country. The report also pointed out that “corruption and official complicity in trafficking remained significant concerns,” which inhibited law enforcement action during the year.<sup>76</sup>

## 6. Triggering factors: election-related violence

The most common triggering factor for atrocity crimes in the Philippines are elections. This is particularly true in hotspot areas such as conflict zones in Mindanao and other provinces in the Visayas where rival political clans have private armies. Election-related violence in the

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<sup>72</sup> “Philippines arrest 400 foreigners in scam centre raid,” The Straits Times, 8 January 2025, from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-arrests-400-foreigners-in-scam-centre-raid>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Dantes, “Philippines deports 89 foreigners tied to scams, cyber fraud,” The Manila Standard, 6 June 2025, from <https://manilastandard.net/news/314599647/philippines-deports-89-foreigners-tied-to-scams-cyber-fraud.html>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>74</sup> See “Philippines: Commission on Human Rights concerns over rise of Filipinos recruited and trafficked to work in cyber scam compounds via online messaging platforms,” Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 4 April 2025, from <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/philippines-commission-on-human-rights-concerns-over-rise-of-filipinos-recruited-and-trafficked-to-work-in-cyber-scam-compounds-via-online-messaging-platforms/>, accessed on 29 September 2025.

<sup>75</sup> “2025 Trafficking in Person Report: Philippines,” US State Department, from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/philippines/>, accessed on 4 October 2025.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Philippines has been marked by threats of political assassinations. Between 2006 and 2023, there were close to 1,500 assassination attempts against incumbent officials and candidates, resulting in 312 politicians wounded and 147 surviving such attempts unharmed. The highest incidents of election-related violence was recorded in 2016, with 133 cases.<sup>77</sup> The May 2025 national and local elections saw a 53 percent drop in election violence, with 49 incidents compared to 105 incidents in 2023.<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, election-related violence in the BARMM had at least 242 people in 719 violent incidents in the run up to the May 2025 elections. This is higher than the PNP's claim as it covered the period from 1 October 2024 (the deadline for filing of certificate of candidacy) up to 13 May 2025 after election day. On election day itself, there were five deaths recorded in BARMM. This shows an upsurge in election violence in the region compared to 165 deaths from 436 incidents in 2023.<sup>79</sup> Two peace monitoring groups have warned of increased risk of violence and instability in Mindanao in the upcoming BARMM regional parliamentary election, following the decision of the MILF leadership to suspend its weapons decommissioning process.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion of the five common risk factors, the Philippines clearly faces considerable risk for atrocity crimes in the medium-term. Although there is a significant drop in EJKs related to the war on drugs since Duterte stepped down from office, the state of human rights protection in the country under the current Marcos government still has much room for improvement, particularly in pursuing accountability for human rights violations committed by state agents. The government also needs to respond more effectively in addressing the root causes of armed conflicts in the country, including upholding its commitment to the peace agreement it signed with the MILF that created the BARMM, as well as ensuring that the peace process continues based on mutual trust and confidence of all stakeholders. The government must also seriously confront the problems of corruption

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<sup>77</sup> Chris Magno, "Guns and ballots: The deadly race for political power," Rappler, 26 February 2025, from <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-guns-ballots-deadly-race-for-political-power/>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Delizo, "PNP reports 53 percent drop in election related-violence," ABS-CBN, 14 May 2025, from <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/5/14/pnp-reports-56-pct-drop-in-election-related-violence-1224>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Jason Sigales, "242 dead in 719-election related incidents in BARMM—group," Inquirer.net, 16 May 2025, from <https://www.inquirer.net/444054/242-dead-in-719-election-related-incidents-in-barmm-group/>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

<sup>80</sup> Franco Jose C. Baroña, "Groups warn of violence in Barmm elections in October," The Manila Times, 23 August 2025, from <https://www.pressreader.com/philippines/manila-times/20250823/281724095652990>, accessed on 1 September 2025.

and a culture of impunity, which could also be linked to the continuing dominance and unchecked influence of political dynasties in government institutions, policies, and decisions. The government should also pursue substantive political reforms such as enactment of a credible law against political dynasties as mandated by the 1987 constitution, as well as amending laws related to the party-list system, strengthening the oversight mechanisms on police and other law enforcement agents, as well as amending the 1991 law on witness protection program to allow former police and law enforcement agents to become state witnesses. It should also seriously consider returning the Philippines as party state to the Rome Treaty.