

Mobilize Penal Populism: Duterte's Narco List

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Introduction

At the core of populist governance lies a crucial puzzle: how does a populist leader dismantle the existing political establishment while consolidating power? While populist leaders often campaign against entrenched elites, they must balance attacking the establishment with maintaining political stability once in power. This tension between disruption and consolidation presents a fundamental challenge for populist governance.

This paper examines the central question: How do populist leaders selectively target local political elites while maintaining political stability? To answer this question, I analyze Rodrigo Duterte's strategic use of the "Narco list" in the Philippines - a public registry of local politicians allegedly involved in the drug trade. As the first president from Mindanao who challenged the dominance of "Imperial Manila" elite, Duterte's use of this list to target local politicians while maintaining high approval ratings provides an ideal case for studying populist governance strategies (Claudio & Abinales, 2017; Parcon, 2021).

I develop a theory of selective targeting in populist governance that explains both target selection and impact effectiveness. The theory posits that populist leaders strategically deploy penal populism - the combination of moral stigmatization and claims to extraordinary powers - to weaken some local elites while protecting others. The effectiveness of this strategy depends on two key institutional factors: (1) the strength of local political networks, particularly dynastic ties that can buffer against attacks, and (2) political alignment with the populist leader through party member-

ship or electoral support. This theoretical framework generates specific predictions: populist targeting will be less likely and less effective against politicians who either possess strong local networks or demonstrate political loyalty, while those lacking both protections will be most vulnerable.

The analysis reveals a complex pattern of both intended and unintended consequences of populist targeting. While Duterte's Narco list largely failed to achieve its electoral objectives against entrenched political networks, with listed mayors from "fat dynasties" or stronghold areas often surviving politically, it had lethal spillover effects. The death rate among listed mayors (10.5%) far exceeded that of non-listed mayors (0.68%), demonstrating how penal populist rhetoric can catalyze extrajudicial violence even when failing to achieve electoral defeats. Although the list included only 1.16% of mayors across two election cycles, it shows how populist stigmatization and claims of extraordinary powers ("Due process has nothing to do with my mouth") can have deadly consequences beyond their intended political effects (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Colegio de San Juan de Letran - Manila, Philippines et al., 2022; Ravanilla, Haim, & Hicken, 2022).

The paper proceeds in three sections. First, I examine how ruling populists address patronage systems, presenting the argument that Duterte used penal populism to selectively replace local brokers (mayors). Second, I analyze political dynasties and patronage in the Philippines as both challenges and opportunities for populist governance. Finally, I employ inferential and descriptive statistics to demonstrate how political dynasties and local alliances shaped both the targeting and effectiveness of the Narco list, while examining its lethal consequences for targeted politicians.

Populism in Patronage Systems

Understanding Party Systems and Political Mobilization

Political systems typically mobilize voters through three distinct mechanisms: programmatic linkages, patronage networks, and populist appeals. In programmatic systems, common in Western democracies, parties mobilize voters primarily through

ideological positions and policy proposals (Aldrich, 2011; McCarty & Schickler, 2018). These systems rely on stable party organizations and clear policy differentiation to maintain voter support.

Patronage systems, in contrast, operate through personalistic networks and resource distribution. Local political brokers—mayors in the Philippine context—serve as crucial intermediaries between national politicians and voters (Kenny, 2017). These brokers maintain voter loyalty through direct material benefits and personal relationships rather than ideological alignment or policy preferences.

Populism Within Patronage Systems

Populism, rather than representing a distinct system, functions as a political strategy that can emerge within either programmatic or patronage contexts. It operates through moral-charged framing and anti-establishment rhetoric, creating a distinctive identity that mobilizes voters through grievances against perceived establishments (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). However, when populist leaders emerge within patronage systems, they face a fundamental dilemma: how to maintain their anti-establishment appeal while working within (or against) existing patronage networks.

This tension creates three potential strategies for populist leaders operating in patronage systems. First, they may attempt to eliminate patronage networks entirely and establish direct connections with voters, as exemplified by Chavez's Communal Councils in Venezuela (Wilde, 2017). Second, they might pursue wholesale replacement of existing networks with new loyal brokers, as demonstrated by Modi's BJP in India (Kenny, 2017). Third, they may engage in selective targeting, strategically weakening some patronage networks while preserving or co-opting others.

Strategic Targeting in Populist Governance

The selective targeting strategy, exemplified by Duterte's approach in the Philippines, offers several advantages for populist leaders. By attacking selected elites while protecting aligned networks, populist leaders can maintain their anti-establishment credentials while preserving political stability (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). This approach

also creates opportunities for expanding their influence by selectively replacing local brokers.

This strategy's effectiveness depends on two key institutional factors. The first is the strength of local political networks, particularly dynasty-based structures (McCoy, 1993). The second is the degree of political alignment between local brokers and the populist leader (Kenny, 2017).

The Filipino Context and Theoretical Expectations

In the Philippines, this theoretical framework operates within a specific institutional context where political dynasties serve as the primary form of local networks (Purdey et al., 2016). Party switching is common, indicating weak programmatic ties (Mendoza et al., 2016). Local brokers (mayors) play crucial roles in vote mobilization, and anti-drug rhetoric provides moral-charged framing for political targeting (Claudio & Abinales, 2017).

The weakness of programmatic parties in the Philippines creates conditions where populist leaders can more easily reshape patronage networks. However, the resilience of political dynasties presents a significant challenge to this strategy. These dynasties, characterized by deep-rooted local connections and extensive resources, have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in the face of political challenges (Mendoza et al., 2019). Their established networks and local influence potentially serve as a buffer against the impact of being targeted, even by high-profile accusations such as those in the Narco list.

These theoretical considerations generate specific predictions about targeting patterns. Populist leaders should avoid targeting brokers in their stronghold areas to maintain stability. They focus attacks on non-aligned brokers with strong networks who could pose future threats, while protecting aligned brokers regardless of their network strength (Sidel, 2014). This framework helps explain why Duterte's Narco list targeted some local politicians while sparing others, leading to our first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: A populist leader is less likely to target mayors who are crucial to maintaining control in his political strongholds.

Hypothesis 1b: A populist leader is more likely to target mayors with strong social networks (such as those from powerful political dynasties) if they do not align with him politically.

The approach enabled Duterte, as a populist outsider, to undermine rival elites while fortifying his power base. By targeting non-aligned officials, particularly those from influential political families, Duterte sought to weaken opposition strongholds. At the same time, he insulated loyal supporters, ensuring the resilience of his political network. The Narco list thus became a dual-purpose tool, advancing his anti-drug campaign rhetoric while serving as a mechanism for political consolidation and patronage system alteration.

Penal Populism as a Political Tool

Populist leaders often frame their opponents as moral transgressors to mobilize public support and justify political persecution. In patronage-based political systems, brokers serve as crucial intermediaries between politicians and voters, playing a pivotal role in maintaining voter loyalty (Kenny, 2017). These brokers—mayors of municipalities in the Filipino context—are often embedded within local political dynasties and have historically wielded significant influence over local political landscapes (Purdey et al., 2016). For a populist leader like Duterte, managing these mayors presents a multifaceted challenge: he must simultaneously fulfill campaign promises to maintain popular support while exerting control over these influential intermediaries to consolidate his rule.

Building on our understanding of selective targeting from the previous section, we observe that Duterte's brand of penal populism has served a dual function: it has not only garnered mass support but also acted as a mechanism for suppressing existing local elites and established mayors. The Narco list emerged as a potent instrument in this selective targeting strategy. By publicly designating certain mayors as corrupt or

complicit in drug-related activities, Duterte effectively discredited opponents while safeguarding allies. This approach exemplifies a combination of two common populist framing devices: stigmatization and dictatorization (Claudio & Abinales, 2017). Duterte labeled mayors as criminals while simultaneously asserting that “Due process has nothing to do with my mouth,” thereby legitimizing his circumvention of established criminal justice procedures.

While our earlier discussion highlighted how the weak, low-institutionalized party system in the Philippines facilitates populist emergence, this institutional weakness does not negate the necessity for political alliances. Indeed, Duterte’s governance has precipitated the formation of a new coalition under his party (PDP-LBN). The frequent party-switching observed among politicians may be indicative not merely of weak party identity but also of mayors’ strategic maneuvers to align with emerging power structures (Mendoza et al., 2016).

Consistent with our theoretical framework of selective targeting, Duterte’s strategy for voter responsiveness and broker management involves differential approaches to maintaining strongholds while penetrating areas of weaker support. Concurrently, he targets non-aligned mayors with robust social networks to gain control over the patronage system. This selective targeting strategy enables Duterte to reconfigure local power dynamics without entirely dismantling the existing system.

However, as anticipated in our discussion of local power structures, the enduring resilience of political dynasties in the Philippines presents a significant challenge to this strategy. These dynasties, characterized by deep-rooted local connections, extensive resources, and generational control over power, have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in the face of political challenges (McCoy, 1993; Mendoza et al., 2016; Purdey et al., 2016). Their established networks and local influence potentially serve as a buffer against the impact of being targeted, even by high-profile accusations such as those in the Narco list.

The tension between populist power and dynastic resilience leads to our second set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: A mayor publicly labeled as corrupt or criminal by the populist leader is more likely to lose political office due to reputational damage.

Hypothesis 2b: A mayor with strong local social networks (e.g., from a powerful political dynasty) is more likely to retain political office despite being targeted, as these networks can buffer the negative effects of being on the Narco list.

These hypotheses address the competing forces at play when Duterte labels a local politician. The H2a recognizes the potent impact of the president's rhetorical power, which can significantly damage a politician's reputation and electoral prospects. Duterte's public accusations carry substantial weight, potentially influencing public opinion and mobilizing opposition against the labeled broker (Parcon, 2021).

Conversely, the H2b acknowledges the potential resilience provided by strong local ties and established networks. These social connections may serve as a buffer against national-level accusations, allowing labeled mayors to maintain support within their constituencies. The tension between these two forces—the populist leader's rhetorical power and the broker's local social network—constitutes the core of this investigation.

By empirically testing these hypotheses, we can quantify the relative strength of national populist tactics versus local political entrenchment. This analysis will provide insights into the effectiveness and limitations of populist labeling strategies in the Philippines, contributing to our understanding of how local power structures interact with and potentially resist national populist campaigns in contexts of entrenched clientelism and personalistic politics (Sidel, 2014).

Duterte Paradox: Electoral Resilience of Allied Mayors on Narco List

Political alignment with populist leaders can create paradoxical effects in patronage systems. While penal populism typically damages its targets' political prospects, its effectiveness may vary significantly based on local political conditions and alliance

structures. This variation becomes particularly evident when examining the electoral impact of Duterte's Narco list on different categories of mayors (Ravanilla, Sexton, & Haim, 2022).

The implementation of the Narco list reveals a strategic balancing act in Duterte's populist governance. On one hand, the War on Drugs required a demonstration of impartiality to maintain credibility with voters, necessitating the inclusion of some political allies on the list. On the other hand, Duterte needed to preserve crucial political relationships, particularly in his stronghold areas. This tension produced a sophisticated form of political targeting where inclusion on the list carried different implications depending on a mayor's relationship with the administration (Parcon, 2021).

For mayors aligned with Duterte or from his power bases, inclusion on the Narco list operates differently than for opposition figures. This differential impact stems from two mechanisms. First, the protective power of association with a popular leader can override negative accusations, particularly in areas where Duterte enjoys strong support. Second, voters in these regions may interpret the list through a partisan lens, viewing inclusion as less credible when it targets their preferred leader's allies (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Colegio de San Juan de Letran - Manila, Philippines et al., 2022).

This pattern of selective enforcement illustrates how populist leaders can weaponize seemingly neutral anti-corruption measures while protecting their political networks. In Duterte's case, the Narco list's impact appears to be moderated by both geographic and political factors. Mayors from his strongholds or those demonstrating consistent political loyalty often retain their electoral viability despite being listed, suggesting that populist association can provide a form of political immunization against even serious accusations (Mendoza et al., 2019).

These observations lead to our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Mayors who are on the Narco list but hail from Duterte's strongholds or are aligned with him politically are less likely to face electoral defeat, as they are

shielded by their alliance with the populist leader.

This hypothesis builds on our previous understanding of both selective targeting and network resilience, suggesting that political alignment with a populist leader can serve as an additional buffer against penal populist tactics, even when those tactics originate from the leader himself. This apparent contradiction—where a populist leader simultaneously deploys and neutralizes his own political weapons—exemplifies the complex nature of populist governance in patronage-based systems.

The Lethal Politics of Penal Populism

Penal populism can escalate beyond electoral consequences to manifest in physical violence, particularly in contexts where patronage systems historically employ coercive power. In the Philippines, violence serves as a well-established instrument for monitoring and controlling both brokers and voters within the patronage system (Sidel, 1999). While coercion exists in various patronage systems worldwide, the Philippines stands out for its institutionalization of extrajudicial violence, which creates moral panic and deters political defection. This violence typically intensifies during electoral periods, often manifesting through vigilante actions or extrajudicial operations (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Duterte's Narco list exemplifies how populist rhetoric can catalyze lethal violence against political targets. The mechanism operates through two channels. First, Duterte employed administrative powers to increase targets' vulnerability, notably by withdrawing police security from listed politicians (Gavilan & Franciso, 2017). Second, his rhetoric legitimized violence against listed individuals by framing them as existential threats to society, culminating in explicit statements that listed mayors should "resign or die" (Ranada, 2017).

The lethal effectiveness of this strategy becomes evident in the stark mortality statistics: 10.5% of listed mayors (four out of thirty-eight) were killed by police or vigilante violence following their inclusion on the list (Gavilan & Franciso, 2017). This rate stands in dramatic contrast to the 0.68% death rate among non-listed mayors

during the same period. Such disparity demonstrates how penal populist labeling can translate into deadly consequences, even when failing to achieve intended electoral outcomes.

This lethal dimension of penal populism reveals a darker aspect of populist governance in patronage systems. While previous sections demonstrated how Duterte strategically deployed the Narco list for political targeting while protecting allies, the violence against listed politicians suggests that the consequences of such targeting extend beyond mere electoral politics. The combination of moral stigmatization (“narco politicians”), removal of state protection, and rhetorical justification for violence created conditions where listed politicians faced not just political but existential threats.

Fundamentally, Duterte’s success in maintaining power while disrupting segments of the political establishment stemmed from his sophisticated combination of populist messaging and targeted coercion. By strategically undermining non-aligned politicians without fully dismantling patronage networks, he achieved a delicate balance between disruption and stability. This strategy exemplifies how populist leaders can navigate the challenges of operating within patronage-based systems—simultaneously asserting authority through force while preserving enough of the existing order to maintain political stability.

The lethal consequences of the Narco list thus demonstrate the full spectrum of penal populism’s impact: from electoral effects to physical elimination of targeted politicians. This pattern suggests that in contexts where violence is already embedded in political competition, populist targeting can escalate existing coercive practices to deadly levels, particularly when backed by state power and moral legitimization.

Research Design

To test the theoretical frameworks developed in previous sections, I constructed a comprehensive dataset of Filipino local executives spanning from 2016 to 2019. The analysis employs a multi-method approach, necessitated by the limited accessibility of criminal records among mayors. Given the institutional challenges—particularly the

lack of judicial independence and limited open data access—verifying formal criminal charges proves difficult. For instance, only two listed mayors have documented criminal records related to drugs or other crimes. Therefore, I first conduct large-N statistical analyses and then examine specific cases to disentangle causal mechanisms.

Data Structure and Sources

The dataset combines several key components:

1. *Baseline Information*: Comprehensive data on all mayors serving from 2016 to 2019
2. *Narco List Status*: Collected from official announcements and news reports (ABS-CBN, 2016; Cabrera, 2018)
3. *Electoral Performance*: Data from the 2016 presidential election and 2019 local elections
4. *Political Networks*: Information on political dynasties and party affiliations

Variable Operationalization

Dependent Variables

I examine two primary dependent variables corresponding to the key theoretical mechanisms:

Target Selection (OnList): Binary indicator for mayors included on Duterte's Narco list which released in 2016 and 2019. (On list =1, not on list =0)

Electoral Outcome (Reelected): Binary indicator for successful reelection in 2019 (re-elected = 1, not re-elected = 0)

Key Explanatory Variables

Fat Dynasty: I code mayors as belonging to a fat dynasty (FatDynasty = 1) when they have at least one family member simultaneously holding elected office (Mendoza et al., 2019). This operationalization captures the expansion of political families and their network strength.

PDPLBN Alignment: Measures political alignment through congress-municipality party alignment. When both the district's representative and mayor belong to PDPLBN, I code this as alignment ($PDPLBN_Alignment = 1$), reflecting Duterte's direct channel of influence from Manila to municipalities.

Duterte's Stronghold: Binary indicator for municipalities where Duterte's 2016 presidential vote share exceeded the 50th percentile ($Duterte_Stronghold = 1$).

Model Specification

To test the hypotheses about targeting patterns and electoral impacts, I develop two main models:

Target Model

This model examines factors influencing inclusion on the Narco list:

$$\begin{aligned}
 OnList_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 FatDynasty_{it} + \beta_2 PDPLBNAlignment_{it} \\
 & + \beta_3 (FatDynasty_{it} \times PDPLBNAlignment_{it}) \\
 & + \beta_4 Duterte's Stronghold_{it} \\
 & + \beta_5 Arrested_{it} \\
 & + \beta_6 (PDPLBN Alignment_{it} \times Duterte's Stronghold_{it}) \\
 & + \alpha_i + \Upsilon_t + \varepsilon_{it}
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where α_i represents region fixed effects and Υ_t captures year fixed effects. The interaction terms are crucial for testing our theoretical predictions about conditional targeting based on political alignment and network strength.

Reelection Model

The Reelection Model examines how being listed affects electoral outcomes, with particular attention to how political networks and alignments moderate these effects:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Reelected_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 OnList_{it} + \beta_2 FatDynasty_{it} \\
 & + \beta_3 Duterte's Stronghold_{it} + \beta_4 Arrested_{it} \\
 & + \beta_5 PDPLBN Alignment_{it} \\
 & + \beta_6 (OnList_{it} \times FatDynasty_{it}) \\
 & + \beta_7 (OnList_{it} \times Duterte's Stronghold_{it}) \\
 & + \alpha_i + \Upsilon_t + \varepsilon_{it}
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

The interaction terms in this model capture two key theoretical mechanisms: how dynastic networks might buffer against the negative effects of being listed (β_6), and how political alignment with Duterte might provide protection (β_7). This allows us to systematically evaluate how populist leaders navigate the tension between disrupting and preserving patronage networks while maintaining political stability.

While both dependent variables are binary, I employ OLS regression rather than logistic regression for several reasons. First, the rare events nature of being listed (only 38 mayors out of over 1,600) could lead to separation issues in maximum likelihood estimation. The Firth logit model is often suggested as a solution for rare events data, but it can produce biased estimates when the sample includes fixed effects (Cook et al., 2020). Second, the coefficients from linear probability models are more directly interpretable, particularly for interaction terms which are central to our theoretical predictions (Ai & Norton, 2003). Third, recent methodological work suggests that OLS performs as well as or better than logistic regression for out-of-sample prediction with binary outcomes, especially when the goal is to estimate marginal effects (Angrist & Pischke, 2010).

To account for regional heterogeneity and temporal changes, both models include region and year fixed effects. This is particularly important given the uneven distribution of listed mayors across regions (see Table 1) and the evolving political context between Duterte's 2016 election and the 2019 midterms.

Table 1: Distribution of Listed Mayors by Region

Region	Number of Mayors
R1 Muslim Mindanao	10
R4A Calabarzon	8
R1 Ilocos Region	4
R8 Western Visayas	4
R10 Northern Mindanao	3
R12 Soccsksargen	3
R7 Central Visayas	2
R2 Cagayan Valley	1
R3 Central Luzon	1
R6B Mimaropa	1
R9 Zamboanga Peninsula	1
Total	38

Together, these models provide a comprehensive framework for testing our hypotheses about selective targeting in populist governance. The Target Model examines the selective targeting hypothesis, testing whether Duterte strategically spared allies and stronghold areas while targeting opponents with strong networks. The Reelection Model assesses both the effectiveness of penal populist targeting and the buffering effect of political networks.

Analysis

Did Duterte Target Mayors in His Strongholds?

Hypothesis 1a: A populist leader is less likely to target mayors who are crucial to maintaining control in his political strongholds.

Finding

The Target Model results reveal a strategic approach in Duterte's use of the Narco list. Mayors in municipalities where Duterte secured substantial support in 2016 were

less likely to be listed (Figure 1). This finding suggests a calculated effort to preserve political stability in areas of strong support. By refraining from targeting mayors in his strongholds, Duterte appears to prioritize consolidating his existing power base over expanding his influence in these areas.

In short, the target model proves the H1a that a ruling populist tends not to target a mayor who is crucial to his stronghold. This finding suggests that Duterte's political strategy involves maintaining strong control over areas where he enjoys significant support, likely to ensure continued loyalty and electoral success. By avoiding conflict with local leaders in these regions, Duterte can preserve his power base and focus his efforts on expanding his influence elsewhere.

Did Duterte Target Non-Aligned Mayors with Strong Social Networks?

Hypothesis 1b: A populist leader is more likely to target mayors with strong social networks (such as those from powerful political dynasties) if they do not align with him politically.

Finding

The results show an increased likelihood of being listed, this effect is not statistically significant in the Target Model. However, the interaction between fat dynasty membership and PDPLBN alignment yields a significant negative effect on the probability of being listed (Figure 1). In other words,

This pattern suggests a selective strategy in Duterte's approach to powerful local networks. Rather than indiscriminately targeting all influential local mayors, Duterte appears to have selectively co-opted those willing to align with his party. This strategy allowed him to weaken potential opposition while simultaneously reinforcing his own power structure.

The findings partially support Hypothesis 1b, indicating that Duterte did indeed target mayors with strong social networks but with a crucial caveat: those who demonstrated loyalty through party alignment were largely spared. This approach reflects a sophisticated balancing act between dismantling opposing power structures

and preserving useful alliances within the existing patronage system.

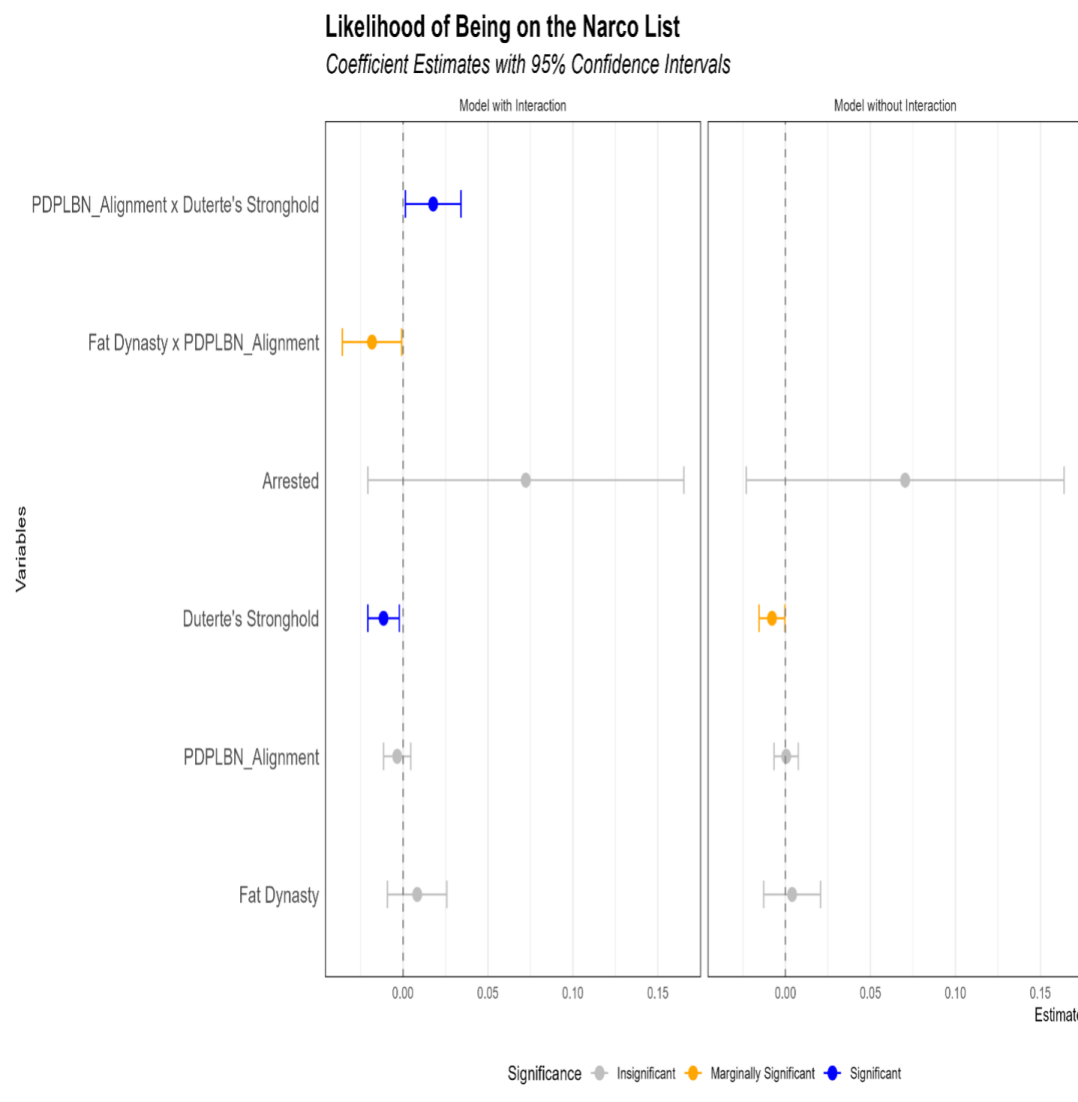


Figure 1: OLS Result of Target Model: the Likelihood of Being on the Narco List

How Did Being Listed Affect Non-Aligned Mayors Without Strong Networks?

Hypothesis 2a: A mayor publicly labeled as corrupt or criminal by the populist leader is more likely to lose political office due to reputational damage and populist rhetoric.

Finding

The Re-election Model confirms that mayors listed on the Narco list face significantly reduced chances of re-election (Figure 2). This finding underscores the potency of Duterte's penal-populist framing, demonstrating how such rhetoric can shape voter perceptions and electoral outcomes. The effectiveness of this strategy highlights voters'

tendency to prioritize moral charges over juridical evidence, a key aspect of populist appeal.

Conversely, mayors allied with Duterte enjoyed increased re-election probabilities, illustrating the substantial coattail effect of Duterte's high approval ratings. Surprisingly, criminal records (such as arrests) did not significantly impact re-election chances, further emphasizing the outsized influence of Duterte's narrative framing over traditional markers of political legitimacy.

These results strongly support Hypothesis 2a, revealing the substantial electoral consequences of Duterte's penal-populist strategy for targeted individuals lacking strong local support networks.

Could Strong Local Networks Buffer the Impact of the Narco List?

Hypothesis 2b: A mayor with strong local social networks (e.g., from a powerful political dynasty) is more likely to retain office despite being targeted, as these networks can buffer the negative effects of being on the Narco list.

Finding

The Re-election Model reveals compelling evidence supporting this hypothesis. Mayors from fat dynasties demonstrated remarkable resilience against the negative effects of being listed on the Narco list. This resilience is likely attributed to their robust social networks and deeply entrenched local influence.

My findings show that while being on the Narco list generally decreased a mayor's chances of re-election, those from fat dynasties were often able to withstand this reputational damage. These mayors frequently retained their positions despite the stigma associated with the Narco list, underscoring the enduring power of political elites with strong local ties.

The data suggests a clear contrast between the electoral fates of listed mayors with and without dynastic backing. While penal populism effectively harmed less connected individuals, its impact was notably limited against those embedded in powerful dynastic networks. This pattern indicates that local social capital can significantly

mitigate the effects of penal populist strategies.

These findings highlight the complex interplay between populist rhetoric, entrenched local power structures, and voter behavior. They suggest that while penal populist strategies like the Narco list can be potent political tools, their effectiveness is significantly moderated by local political dynamics and social networks.

This analysis not only supports Hypothesis 2b but also reveals the nuanced nature of political resilience in the face of populist tactics. It underscores the importance of considering local power structures and social capital when assessing the impact of national-level political strategies. The ability of fat dynasties to weather the storm of being listed demonstrates the deep-rooted nature of their influence and the limitations of top-down attempts to reshape local political landscapes.

Did Political Alignment or Stronghold Status Shield Mayors from the Narco List's Effects?

Hypothesis 3: Mayors who are listed on the Narco list but hail from Duterte's strongholds or are aligned with him politically are less likely to face electoral defeat, as they are shielded by their alliance with the populist leader.

Finding

Empirical findings from both the Target Model and the Reelection Model support this hypothesis, revealing a counterintuitive trend: listed mayors from Duterte's strongholds or those politically affiliated with him exhibit enhanced prospects for being reelected compared to their non-aligned counterparts. This outcome indicates a significant dynamic wherein voter behavior appears to prioritize a mayor's allegiance to Duterte over the implications of criminal accusations.

This electoral pattern provides substantial insights into the nature of Duterte's penal populism and its selective application. It underscores a sophisticated strategy of political control, wherein the Narco list serves dual functions: as a potential threat for political adversaries and, paradoxically, as a test of loyalty for allies that, when endured, may reinforce their political position.

However, an alternative interpretation warrants consideration. The observed pattern might indicate internal factionalism within the PDPLBN under Duterte's presidency. The targeting of certain PDPLBN members in Duterte's strongholds could be interpreted as an effort to manage intra-party conflicts or to discipline disloyal factions. This perspective introduces additional complexity to the analysis, suggesting that the Narco list may function not only as a tool for broad political control but also for nuanced intra-party management.

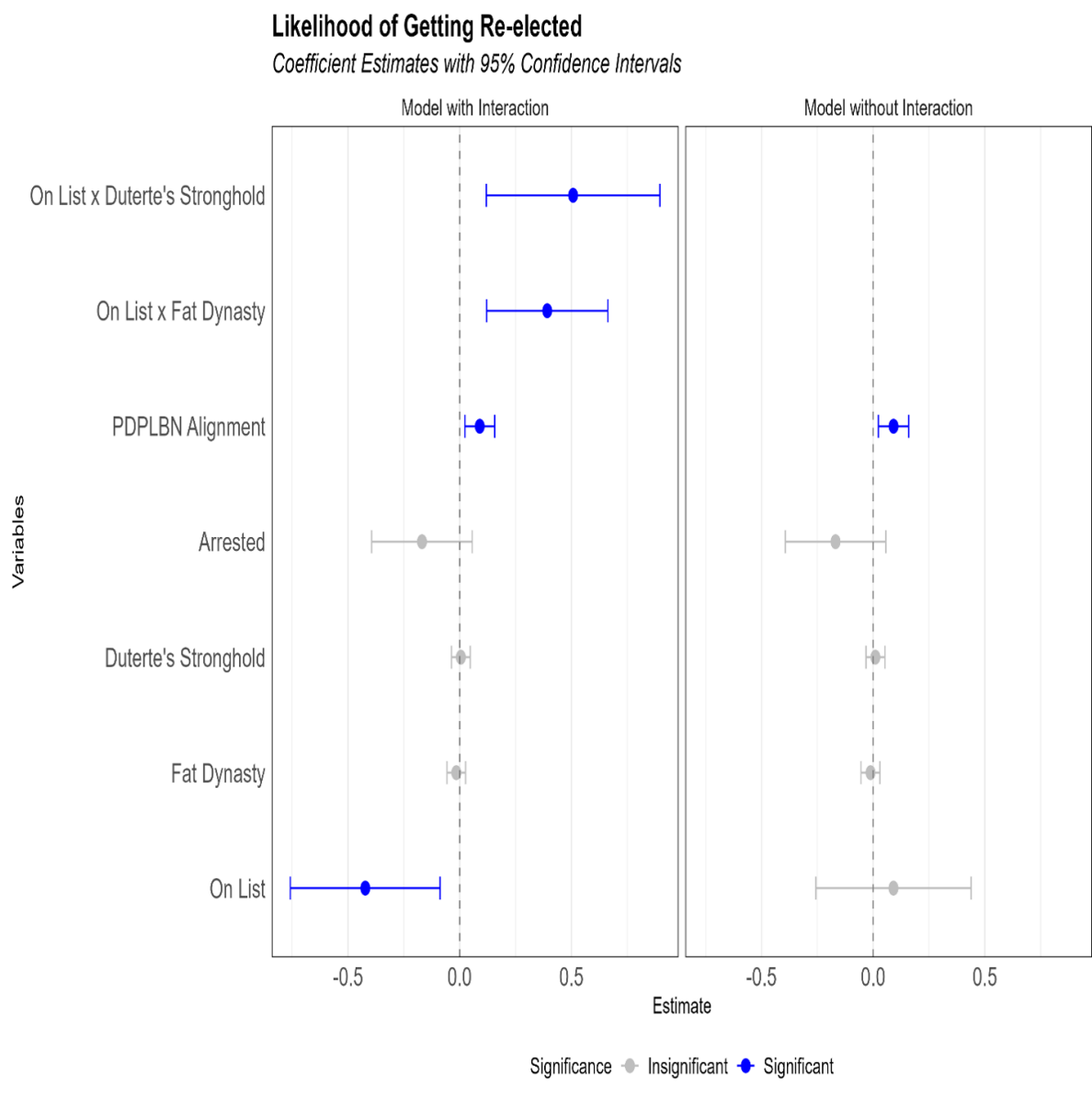


Figure 2: OLS Result of Reelection Model: the Likelihood of Getting Re-elected

Robustness Check

To validate the findings of both my target and re-election models, I conducted robustness checks using a leave-province-out analysis. This method was chosen over a traditional leave-observation-out approach due to the relatively small number of outcomes in my dataset, which represents the entire population of mayors rather than a sample. The leave-province-out analysis allows me to assess whether any particular province drives my results or if they hold consistently across different subsets of the data.

The results of the robustness checks, as illustrated in Figures 5.4 and 5.5 for the target and re-election models, respectively, demonstrate strong consistency with my original model estimates. The coefficient estimates from the robustness checks, represented by colored points with 95% confidence intervals, closely align with the original estimates depicted by black triangles. This alignment is observed across all variables in both models, including key factors such as PDPLBN Alignment, Fat Dynasty, Duterte's Stronghold, and their various interactions.

For the Target Model (Figure 3), the robustness check corroborates the significant positive interaction between PDPLBN Alignment and Duterte's Stronghold, supporting my conclusion about the complex dynamics of targeting within Duterte's areas of strong support. The marginally significant negative interaction between Fat Dynasty and PDPLBN Alignment also remains consistent, lending credence to my interpretation of the nuanced relationship between dynastic power and political alignment in the context of Duterte's drug war.

In the Re-election model (Figure 4), the robustness check confirms the negative impact of being on Duterte's drug list on a mayor's re-election chances, supporting my interpretation of the potent effect of penal-populist framing on voter behavior. Importantly, it also validates the counterintuitive interactions where being on the list combined with membership in a fat dynasty or being in Duterte's stronghold increases re-election probability. This consistency reinforces my observations about the mitigating effects of strong social networks and local political dynamics.

Notably, in both models, the non-significance of the "Arrested" variable is maintained in the robustness checks. This consistency supports my conclusion that actual arrests play a limited role in both the targeting process and voter decision-making, emphasizing the importance of political factors and populist framing.

The stability of these findings across different provincial subsets enhances my confidence in the identified patterns relating to political alignments, local power structures, and the implementation of Duterte's drug war policies. These robust results underscore the complex interplay between populist strategies, local political dynamics, and electoral outcomes in the Philippine context.

The robustness checks support the reliability and generalizability of both my target and re-election model findings across the Filipino mayors in election cycles. The consistency of results across different provincial subsets reinforces the identified patterns of strategic targeting and electoral impacts in Duterte's drug war.

However, the Re-election model reveals counterintuitive outcomes, particularly when being on the list interacts with Fat Dynasty status or location in Duterte's stronghold. In these cases, mayors are more likely to be re-elected. For fat dynasty mayors, their social networks may offset the negative impact of being listed. In Duterte's strongholds, questions arise about whether listed mayors quickly align with Duterte post-listing or if local voters view the list as a political tactic. To better understand these interactions and their electoral effects, a closer look at re-election rates between listed and non-listed mayors, especially within these specific contexts, is needed. The comparison will provide context for the following descriptive statistics, helping to clarify the relationship between political alignments, dynasties, and penal-populist framing.

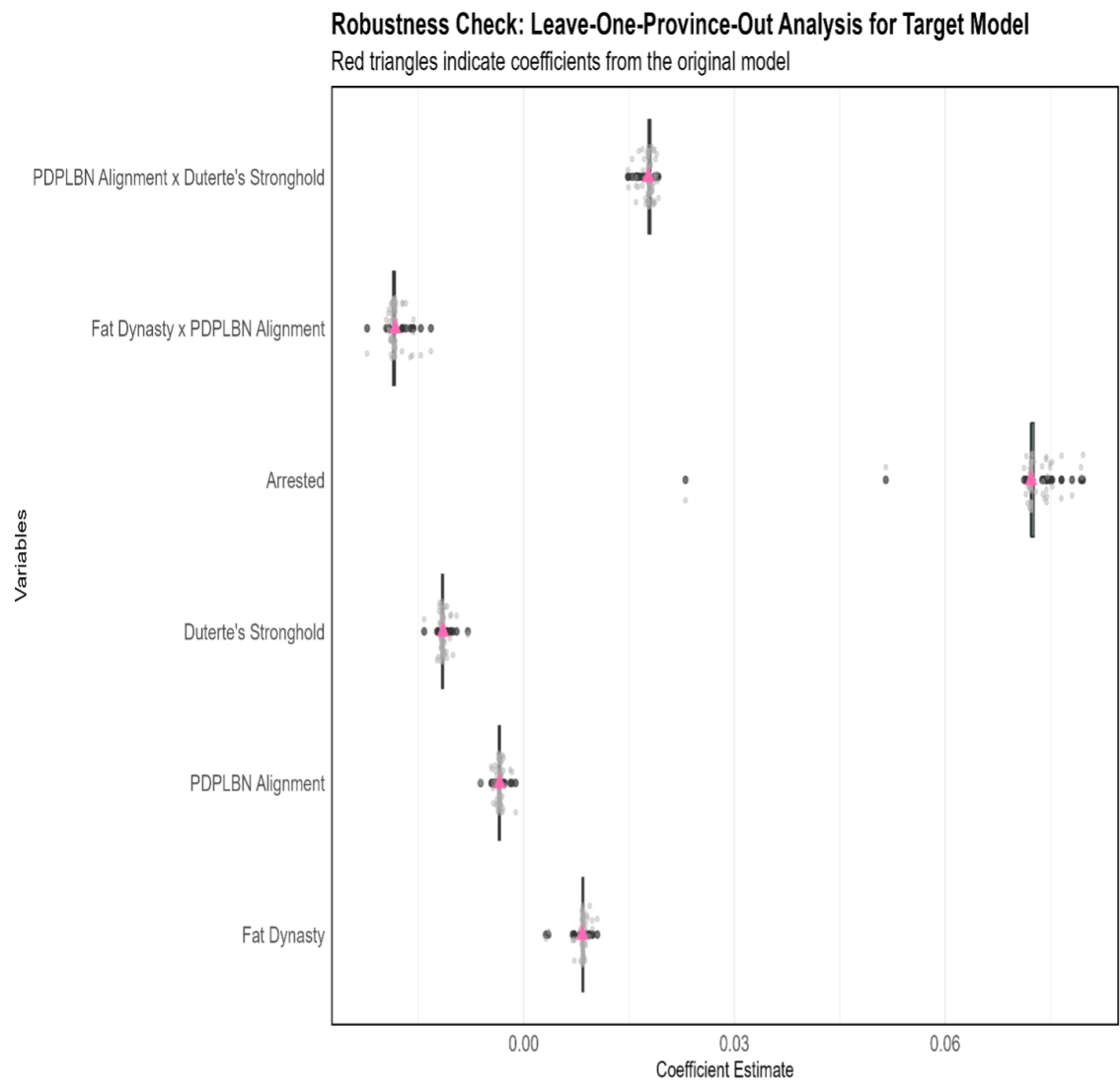


Figure 3: Robustness Check of the Target Model

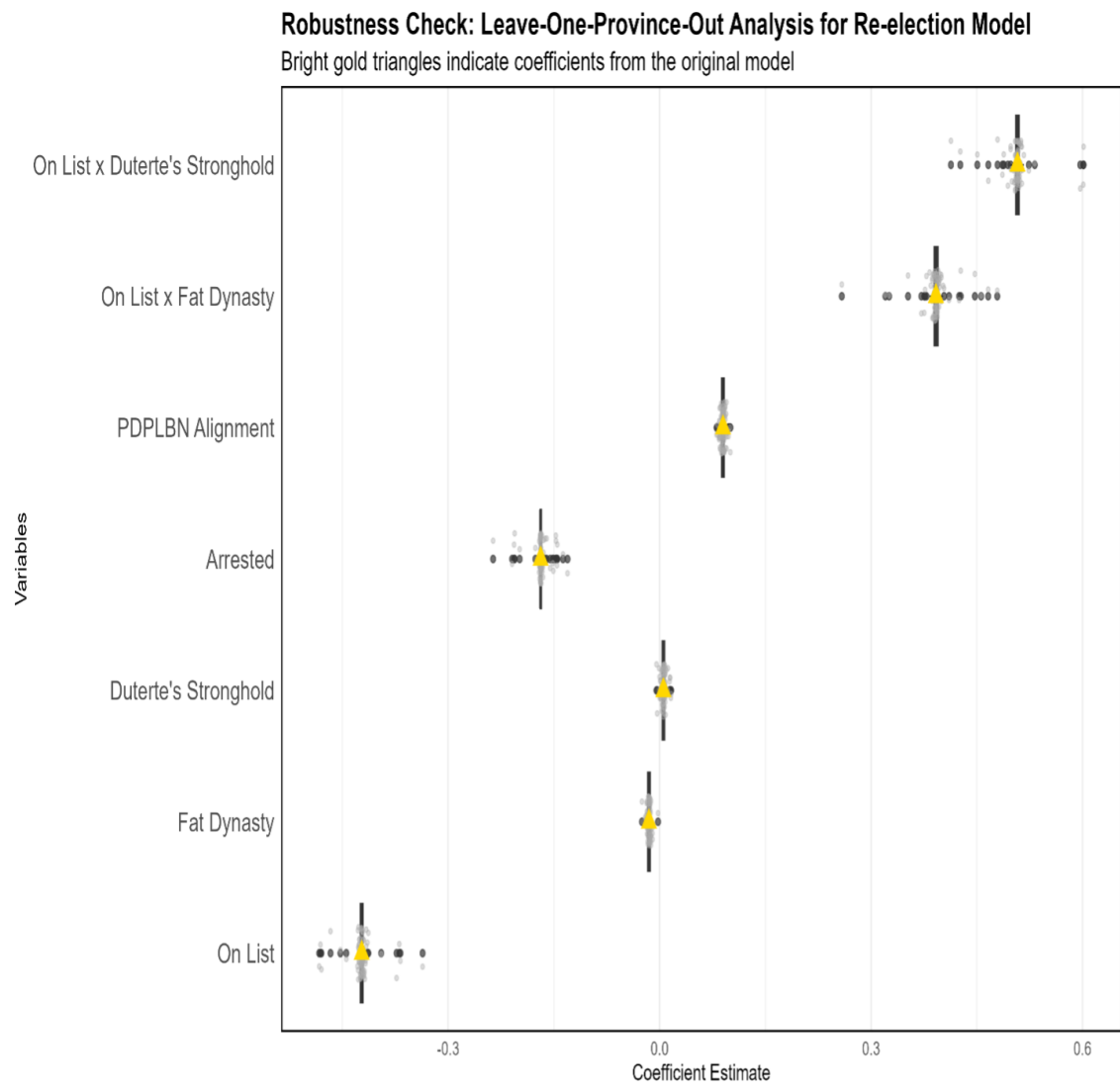


Figure 4: Robustness Check of the Reelection Model

Re-election Rates: Listed vs. Unlisted Mayors

After obtaining counterintuitive results from my regression analysis of the Reelection Model, I returned to examine the descriptive statistics to gain a clearer understanding of the data. Figure 5 presents a breakdown of re-elected rates by group and list status, providing a clear difference in the impact of Duterte's narco list on mayoral re-elections.

The most striking observation from this figure is the stark contrast in re-election rates for mayors who are neither from fat dynasties nor in Duterte's strongholds (the "Neither" category). For this group, I see a significant difference between those on the list and those not on the list. Mayors not on the list have a re-election rate of

53.2% (226 out of 425), while those on the list have a 0% re-election rate (0 out of 2). Although the sample size for listed mayors in this category is small, the contrast is notable. It suggests that being on the Narco list has a substantial negative impact on re-election prospects for mayors lacking the potential protective factors of dynastic ties or stronghold support or attraction.

It helps explain my initially counterintuitive OLS results. While the overall effect of being on the list might appear less significant due to the varying impacts across different groups, the "Neither" category reveals the list's potent effect on more vulnerable mayors. The narco list seems to matter most when a mayor doesn't have the political insulation provided by either fat dynasty connections or being in a Duterte stronghold.

Interestingly, for mayors from fat dynasties or in Duterte strongholds, the negative impact of being on the list is less pronounced or even reversed. Notably, mayors who are both from fat dynasties and in Duterte strongholds show a 100% re-election rate when on the list (4 out of 4), compared to 50.2% (201 out of 400) when not on the list. The difference suggests that political connections and local power structures may mitigate or even outweigh the negative effects of being named on the narco list.

The descriptive statistics highlight the fact that penal-populist targeting works, but it hardly penetrates the existing political networks, such as solid dynasties. Also, Duterte's popularity seems not to help Duterte purge the targeted politicians. Probably, voters have different rational preferences regarding presidential and mayoral elections.

The Re-election Model explains the second hypothesis in some circumstances. For mayors without strong political or familial safeguards, the data strongly supports Hypothesis 2a: labeled mayors are indeed more likely to lose office, demonstrating the potency of the populist leader's rhetorical power. The stark contrast in re-election rates for the "Neither" category (53.2% for unlisted vs. 0% for listed mayors) clearly illustrates this effect.

Conversely, for mayors from fat dynasties or in Duterte strongholds, the results support Hypothesis 2b: labeled mayors with solid political networks are more likely to

retain their positions. It is most evident in the 100% re-election rate for listed mayors who are both from fat dynasties and in Duterte strongholds, compared to the 50.2% rate for their unlisted counterparts.

After all, it shows that the ruling populist's target may work, but its applicability is conditional on the mayor's political context. In other words, it still hardly penetrates the political network at the local level. The narco list's impact is not uniform but varies significantly based on the strength of a mayor's political and social networks. However, it would be better to delve into several cases, for example, the four listed mayors who are from the fat dynasties and in Duterte's strongholds but got reelected (Table 5.2 and 5.3). We may see the detailed mechanism between the penal-populist framing and the political networks.

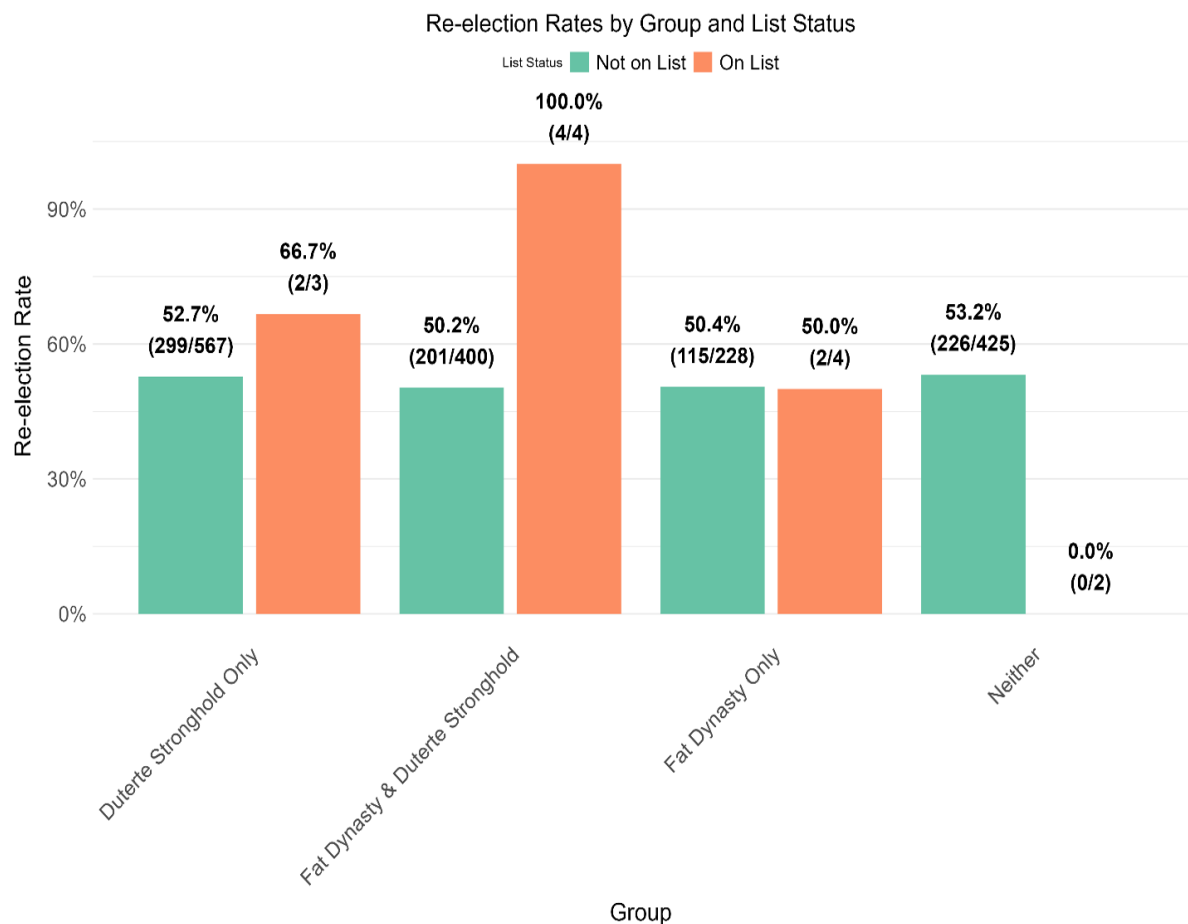


Figure 5: Compare the Re-election Rate between listed and not-on-list Mayors

Table 2: The Ratio of Re-elected Mayors between Being on the List or Not

Group	Not on the List	On the List
Duterte's Stronghold Only	299/567 (52.73%)	2/3 (66.67%)
Fat Dynasty Only	115/228 (50.44%)	2/4 (50.00%)
Fat Dynasty and Duterte's Stronghold	201/400 (50.25%)	4/4 (100.00%)
Neither	226/425 (53.18%)	0/2 (0.00%)
Overall	841/1620 (51.91%)	8/13 (61.54%)

Table 3: The Listed Mayors from Fat Dynasties, Duterte's Strongholds, or both

Category	Mayor	Municipality	Party	Re-elected
Fat Dynasty Only	Menchie De Guzman	Bauang	PPF	No
Fat Dynasty Only	Julie Pacificador	Hamtic	NUP	No
Fat Dynasty Only	Larry Alilio	Lemery	NP	Yes
Fat Dynasty Only	Amben Amante	San Pablo	NP	Yes
Duterte's Stronghold Only	Ohto Montawal	Datu Montawal	PDPLBN	No
Duterte's Stronghold Only	Raul Palino	Teresa	PDPLBN	Yes
Duterte's Stronghold Only	Gamar Janihim	Sirawai	PDPLBN	Yes
Overlapping	Albert Palencia	Banga	NPC	Yes
Overlapping	Ezel Villanueva	Calamba	NP	Yes
Overlapping	Cesar Perez	Los Banos	IND	Yes
Overlapping	Dondon Alcala	Lucena	PDPLBN	Yes

The Case of Jed Mabilog

The story of Jed Mabilog compellingly illustrates the political calculations underlying Duterte's Narco list. While fat dynasties and strongholds may provide some protection against inclusion, the likelihood of being listed fluctuates for PDPLBN members. Mabilog's case is particularly noteworthy for several reasons.

Firstly, neither the administration nor the courts have uncovered any evidence of Mabilog's involvement in drug-related activities. The U.S. government's decision to grant him political asylum further corroborates his innocence. Secondly, Mabilog does not hail from a fat dynasty, nor was his city, Iloilo City, a Duterte stronghold. In fact, Duterte's vote share in Iloilo City (18.7%) was significantly lower than his national average (39.01%).

The most intriguing aspect of Mabilog's case is his party affiliation. Following Duterte's victory in the 2016 presidential election, Mabilog switched his allegiance from the Liberal Party (LP) to PDPLBN. Despite this realignment, Duterte appeared to intensify his stigmatization of Mabilog, likely due to Iloilo City's status as a critical metropolitan area in the region. Duterte's ominous warning to Mabilog, "You are next," following the death of the Mayor of Ozamiz City, underscores the gravity of the situation (Ranada, 2017).

Mabilog's testimony provides crucial insight into the political motivations and lethal threats associated with the Narco list. He alleges that a police commander attempted to coerce him, offering a deal. If Mabilog agreed to implicate "one former opposition presidential candidate and one opposition senator" in drug-related activities, he would be cleared of accusations against him (Abanto, 2024). This alleged quid pro quo arrangement suggests that the Narco list was potentially being used as a tool to target political opponents beyond just local officials (Marzan, 2024). Moreover, Mabilog contends that he was targeted due to Iloilo City's low support for Duterte in 2016, reinforcing the idea that political considerations played a significant role in the compilation of the list. His account of facing life-threatening intimidation from the police further underscores the dangerous consequences of being named on the list,

even for those who had switched allegiance to Duterte's party.

While Mabilog's testimony requires further verification, it lends support to the argument presented in this dissertation. As a politician lacking the protection of a fat dynasty and governing a city with weak support for Duterte, Mabilog became a likely target of Duterte's penal populism despite the absence of evidence linking him to drug-related activities. Furthermore, Mabilog's case demonstrates that even after aligning with Duterte's party, the Narco list continued to serve as a tool for testing the loyalty of new affiliates, effectively functioning as a "proof of allegiance" for political newcomers.

Conclusion

My research demonstrates that Duterte's use of the Narco list to undermine political rivals failed to achieve its intended electoral outcomes but inadvertently facilitated lethal violence against local elites. The penal-populist framing, while not immediately penetrating local political networks, incited overt violence. These findings reveal Duterte's employment of penal populism as a political instrument rather than a genuine anti-drug effort.

Duterte's strategy of selective targeting allowed him to weaken rivals without destabilizing his power base. His approach shows how populist leaders can strategically challenge entrenched power structures while maintaining political stability. Duterte succeeded by shielding loyal mayors and rewarding loyalists while attacking opposition figures.

Penal populism proved effective against non-hereditary, non-aligned elites. However, political actors with strong local networks, particularly from fat dynasties, often resisted its impact. Their resilience highlights the challenges populist leaders face when attempting to uproot established kinship networks.

My analysis reveals that while populists may win national elections, their influence often fails to penetrate established clientelist systems effectively. Duterte's approach also illustrates the importance of strategic co-optation, as he aligned with

certain political elites to maintain control while dismantling parts of the establishment.

The empirical analysis of Duterte's Narco list illuminates the interplay between populist strategies, entrenched political systems, and penal populism as a political tool. It paves the way for further studies by highlighting key areas for investigation: the effectiveness of selective targeting, the resilience of local political networks, the role of violence in populist tactics, the importance of strategic alliances, and the impact of penal populism on electoral outcomes and political violence.

Future research can build on these findings to develop more comprehensive models of how populist leaders operate within and transform existing political systems. By examining diverse cases across different political contexts, scholars can refine our understanding of the dynamics between populism, established power structures, and democratic processes. My work contributes to a growing body of literature on the strategies populist leaders employ, their varying degrees of success, and the broader implications for democratic governance and political stability.

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