

“Tatay Digong” as Prototypical, Political Metaphor: A Content Analysis of Senator Bong Go’s Prayer Rally Speech on March 15, 2025, at Liwasang Bonifacio, Manila

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the metaphorical framing of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte as “Tatay Digong” in Senator Bong Go’s prayer rally speech amid Duterte’s International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Prototype Theory of Meaning (Allan, 2015), the analysis explores how familial metaphors recontextualize political leadership through culturally embedded notions of Filipino fatherhood. A qualitative content analysis of Go’s speech reveals recurring rhetorical patterns of paternal care, sacrificial suffering, and moral obligation, positioning Duterte not as a politician facing legal scrutiny but as a vulnerable patriarch deserving loyalty. Themes of familial framing, emotional blackmail through loyalty, and religious and moral sacralization illustrate how the “tatay” metaphor transforms legal accountability into an affective and moral narrative. Rather than making broad claims about public perception, this study highlights how such metaphors create interpretive scenarios that can obscure institutional processes by reframing governance as kinship. By situating Duterte’s “tatay” persona within both Philippine cultural values and broader Southeast Asian populist traditions, the findings underscore the political power of familial metaphors in legitimizing authority and insulating leaders from critique. Future research could extend this approach by analyzing similar metaphors in other political speeches or digital discourse, offering comparative insights into how familial frames sustain affective loyalty in populist regimes.

Keywords: Duterte, Tatay Digong, familial metaphors, populism, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Prototype Theory, ICC investigation

I. INTRODUCTION

Rodrigo Roa Duterte, the 16th President of the Republic of the Philippines, is widely referred to not only by his formal title but also by the deeply personal nickname “Tatay Digong.” The Filipino term *tatay* (father) is far more than a casual term of endearment; it is a political metaphor and cultural frame that draws on ingrained kinship values in Philippine society. In a culture where familial ties remain central to identity, *tatay* evokes the archetype of a disciplinarian yet caring father figure—someone associated with authority, sacrifice, and protection (Alampay, 2013).

This metaphor becomes particularly salient in moments of political crisis. As Duterte faces international scrutiny from the International Criminal Court (ICC) over

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allegations of crimes against humanity during his administration's "war on drugs," his public image has been rhetorically reframed in ways that emphasize vulnerability, loyalty, and moral injustice. While legal accountability is the central concern of the ICC investigation, political allies and some segments of Duterte's support base have invoked the *tatay* metaphor to portray him as a misunderstood patriarch unfairly targeted by outsiders (Mamunta, 2022). This suggests that familial metaphors have the potential to reshape how legal controversies are publicly framed, shifting focus away from institutional judgment toward emotional narratives of care and defense.

Familial metaphors in politics are not unique to the Philippines; similar framings are observed in global populist movements. Populist leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Jair Bolsonaro, and Donald Trump often cultivate closeness and loyalty through narratives of care, crisis, and victimhood (Moffitt, 2016). However, in the Philippine context, where *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *pakikisama* (harmonious relations), and *sakop* (belongingness) remain deeply embedded cultural scripts, the *tatay* metaphor carries distinct cultural force (Mamunta, 2022). By mapping private familial relations onto the public sphere, the metaphor can blur the boundaries between civic duty and filial obligation, making governance feel personal rather than institutional.

Several commentators and scholars have explored how *Tatay Digong* has shaped discourse surrounding Duterte's leadership. Jimenez-David (2017), writing for the Philippine Daily Inquirer, noted how the paternal framing reinforces closeness and trust, allowing critiques to be softened by presenting Duterte as a father figure rather than a traditional politician. Mamunta (2022), in *Tatay Digong, Ka-DDS, and Sakop: Filipino Populism Under Duterte*, analyzed how Duterte's populism operates within Filipino cultural tendencies to extend familial hierarchies into political spaces, creating a symbolic "political family" where Duterte acts as father and Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) occupy the role of children.

On the other hand, critical commentaries have warned of the risks of this framing. For instance, *It's Time Duterte's Supporters Stop Referring to Him as Tatay* (Get Real Philippines, 2017) argued that treating a leader primarily as a parent figure risks infantilizing citizens and discouraging critical engagement. Similarly, Aquino (2019), in *BusinessWorld*, observed that Duterte's enduring popularity often relies on emotional appeals rather than policy performance. Regalado (2021), writing for *Spot.ph*, positioned Duterte within a broader Philippine tendency to cast politicians as familial figures — *tatay*, *nanay*, *kuya*, or *ate* — which can create intimacy but also risk conflating political accountability with personal loyalty.

Taken together, these perspectives highlight that *Tatay Digong* is more than a benign nickname. It functions as a discursive tool that activates cultural scripts of loyalty and care, potentially influencing how controversies surrounding Duterte are framed and understood. While this does not suggest that all Filipinos uncritically adopt the metaphor, it demonstrates how political rhetoric can strategically mobilize familiar cultural patterns to shape discourse around leadership.

This raises important questions for understanding how language mediates political meaning. The metaphor "*Tatay Digong*" has been strategically used to

accompany narratives of suffering, loyalty, and injustice in relation to Duterte's ICC investigation. When deployed in political speeches, it appears to shift the focus from institutional processes to moral and familial reasoning. Rather than examining whether Duterte, as a former head of state, is legally accountable for alleged human rights violations, the rhetoric recasts him as a patriarch who is "wronged" and deserving of empathy.

Despite scholarly work on Duterte's populist style and rhetoric (Thompson, 2016; Tugano, 2022), there remains limited research on how culturally specific familial metaphors function in high-stakes rhetorical moments. Much of the existing literature examines Duterte's discourse in aggregate but does not closely analyze how a single, emblematic speech—such as Senator Bong Go's prayer rally speech—uses metaphor, narrative, and emotional appeals to construct an alternative framing of legal controversies.

Understanding these rhetorical strategies is crucial in a political culture where emotional appeals often intersect with democratic processes. Examining how the *tatay* metaphor is mobilized provides insight into the interplay between cultural identity, emotional loyalty, and institutional accountability in Philippine politics.

This study is therefore guided by the main question: how the metaphorical use of the term "*Tatay Digong*" in public discourse serves to frame former President Rodrigo Duterte in the context of his ICC legal controversies, and how this framing shapes public perception, particularly among his supporters in the DDS community. To unpack this inquiry, the study also addresses the following sub-problems: the recurring themes and rhetorical patterns that accompany the metaphor "*Tatay Digong*" in political speeches and online commentary related to Duterte's ICC investigation, and how supporters, particularly DDS members, interpret and reproduce the metaphor "*Tatay Digong*" in public and digital discourse, revealing affective political loyalty in the Philippines. By answering these questions, the study aims to uncover how a seemingly simple metaphor becomes a powerful discursive tool that reshapes moral reasoning, emotional attachment, and democratic accountability in the Philippines.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two interrelated linguistic theories that explain how meaning is constructed and interpreted in discourse: Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Prototype Theory of Meaning (Allan, 2015). Together, these frameworks provide a lens for understanding how the metaphor "*Tatay Digong*" shapes the public's moral and emotional perception of Rodrigo Duterte's legal controversies with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that humans understand abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete, familiar experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors are not merely ornamental features of language but fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape how people perceive and reason about the

world. Through metaphorical mapping, people transfer meaning from a *source domain* (a familiar experience) to a *target domain* (an abstract or complex concept).

In political discourse, this means abstract ideas such as governance, justice, or nationhood are often understood through familiar domains like family or morality (Charteris-Black, 2011). For example, when a leader is framed as a *father*, the state is implicitly imagined as a *family*, and citizens are construed as *children* who owe loyalty and respect. This metaphorical structure guides how the audience interprets political controversies: criticism becomes disobedience, legal processes become family betrayals, and punishment becomes parental discipline rather than authoritarian excess.

Applied to this study, CMT helps explain how the metaphor “*DUTERTE IS A FATHER*” reframes the ICC investigation. Rather than being seen as a legal and institutional matter, Duterte’s plight is understood as the suffering of a patriarch wronged by outsiders. In Bong Go’s speech, familial imagery (“*wala siyang tsinelas*,” “*nangungulila ang bayan*”) invites the public to perceive Duterte not as a former president facing accountability but as a beloved *tatay* enduring unjust hardship. Thus, CMT illuminates how a single metaphor can redefine the moral frame of political events and shift public sentiment from rational critique to emotional loyalty.

2. Prototype Theory of Meaning.

Complementing CMT is the Prototype Theory of Meaning, which explains how categories and concepts are organized in human cognition. Rather than viewing categories as rigid sets of necessary and sufficient conditions, Prototype Theory suggests that people categorize concepts based on *typicality* or *family resemblance* – some members of a category are seen as more representative than others (Rosch, 1975; Allan, 2015).

In the Filipino cultural context, the prototype of *tatay* (father) carries a predictable cluster of attributes: strength, moral authority, self-sacrifice, protection, and even sternness (Alampay, 2013). Filipino fathers are often seen as both disciplinarians and providers—figures who command respect while embodying care and sacrifice. By invoking the metaphor “*Tatay Digong*,” Bong Go activates this culturally specific prototype. Narratives of Duterte’s medical struggles, refusal to flee the country, and past political “sacrifices” align him with the prototypical Filipino father, making him a plausible and emotionally resonant figure in the public imagination.

Prototype Theory helps explain why this metaphor resonates so deeply with Filipino audiences. Even if Duterte does not embody all possible traits of a father, he approximates enough central features of the prototype – strength, authority, and care – that the metaphor feels natural and convincing. This categorization allows supporters to transfer real-life feelings about their own fathers onto Duterte, reinforcing affective political loyalty.

Together, Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Prototype Theory of Meaning offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing Bong Go’s speech. CMT explains how the metaphor “*Duterte is a Father*” structures public understanding by mapping familial relationships onto political realities. Prototype Theory clarifies why this mapping is effective in the

Filipino context, given the cultural prototype of fatherhood that Duterte symbolically fulfills.

By combining these theories, the study moves beyond treating “*Tatay Digong*” as a mere rhetorical nickname. Instead, it reveals how metaphors function as cognitive and cultural tools that reshape public perception, moral reasoning, and political allegiance. This theoretical integration also highlights the potential risks of such metaphors, as they can obscure institutional accountability and reinforce populist narratives of intimacy and victimhood.

Literature Review

The metaphorical framing of political leaders as parental figures is a widespread yet undertheorized phenomenon in Philippine political discourse. In particular, the label “*Tatay Digong*” transcends mere nickname status; it represents a discursive and ideological frame that mobilizes deeply ingrained cultural scripts of kinship, moral obligation, and authority (Barthes, 1972). Within this frame, Rodrigo Duterte is not only imagined as a head of state but as a father – protector, disciplinarian, and moral anchor. Such framing reshapes the citizen-state relationship, transforming it into a familial relationship imbued with emotional loyalty and affective resonance.

This chapter situates the *tatay* metaphor within three interrelated domains: Filipino cultural conceptions of fatherhood, populist performance in both Philippine and Southeast Asian contexts, and the moral scenarios generated by metaphors in political discourse. It also explicates how two key theoretical frameworks – Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Prototype Theory of Meaning – provide the analytical foundation for this study.

1. Filipino fatherhood as cultural prototype.

Fatherhood in the Philippines carries a distinctly moral and emotional weight shaped by cultural values such as *pakikisama* (harmonious relations), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), and *hiya* (a sense of propriety or shame). Alampay (2013) describes the Filipino father as simultaneously a disciplinarian and protector, a figure who evokes respect, fear, and affection in equal measure. Within this cultural constellation, a father is expected to be both firm and sacrificial, embodying authority tempered by love.

This cultural prototype provides the conceptual scaffolding for understanding why the metaphor of *tatay* resonates so powerfully in political discourse. As Prototype Theory of Meaning suggests, the term *tatay* evokes a cognitive model rich with culturally shared expectations of moral uprightness, protectiveness, and self-sacrifice (Allan, 2015). When Duterte is discursively positioned as *Tatay Digong*, he is framed not merely as an elected leader but as a paternal figure who stands above transactional politics. This rhetorical positioning naturalizes Duterte’s authority; like a father whose decisions are assumed to be for the good of his family, his governance is reframed as morally justified, even when it entails harsh or controversial measures.

This cultural resonance also helps explain how Duterte’s actions, such as the war on drugs, can be interpreted by supporters not as state violence but as paternal discipline.

It is within this cultural and emotional schema that the metaphor *tatay* gains its persuasive force.

2. Familial metaphors and populist politics.

The *tatay* metaphor also operates within the logic of populist communication, where leaders seek to embody the will and emotions of “the people.” Canovan’s (1999) influential model of populism identifies two faces: the redemptive face, which appeals to the pure moral essence of “the people,” and the pragmatic face, which deals with institutional governance. Duterte’s *tatay* image clearly aligns with the redemptive face, positioning him as a father protecting his children (the Filipino people) from corrupt elites, drug criminals, and foreign interference.

This familial framing enables Duterte to circumvent the expectations of the pragmatic face, just as a father makes unilateral decisions “for the family” without needing institutional approval. By recasting his populist governance as paternal care, the *tatay* metaphor collapses the distinction between personal loyalty and civic duty, making criticism appear as betrayal.

Moreover, Moffitt (2016) underscores the performative dimension of populism, arguing that populist leaders do not merely advance ideas; they enact them through tone, style, and emotional appeals. Duterte’s political persona – blunt, macho, and deliberately unfiltered – mirrors the archetype of a Filipino father who is “real,” unpretentious, and willing to get his hands dirty for the sake of his family. Tugano (2022, 2024) notes that Duterte’s use of profanity and emotional outbursts, far from alienating supporters, enhances his perceived authenticity and care. The *tatay* metaphor thus becomes a performance device, enabling Duterte to embody both tenderness and toughness in ways that resonate with Filipino cultural expectations.

This performative populism is not unique to the Philippines. Familial metaphors also appear in Southeast Asian populism. Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand, for example, was popularly framed as *phô khong chat* (“father of the nation”), while Sukarno in Indonesia was affectionately referred to as *Bung Karno* (“big brother”). In these cases, familial metaphors collapse institutional accountability into emotional allegiance, a dynamic that Duterte’s *tatay* framing similarly replicates (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

3. Metaphor scenarios and moral frames.

Metaphors do more than decorate speech; they create coherent scenarios that structure moral reasoning. Musolff (2016) argues that metaphors generate interpretive frames where political actors are cast in specific moral roles. When a leader is described as “the father of the nation,” citizens are positioned as children who owe obedience and gratitude, criticism is reframed as disobedience, and legal accountability becomes akin to family betrayal.

Applied to Duterte, the *tatay* metaphor creates a moral scenario in which his ICC investigation is no longer seen as neutral legal scrutiny but as an illegitimate intrusion into a family’s private affairs. This moral reframing transforms institutional processes into emotional crises, thereby mobilizing affective solidarity rather than rational debate.

Camroux (2022) adds depth to this analysis by examining Duterte's punitive populism, which combines two seemingly opposing personas: "*The Punisher*", who justifies state violence as necessary, and "*Tatay Digong*", who frames such violence as paternal tough love. This dual identity allows Duterte to normalize authoritarian practices while sustaining an image of care and intimacy. Crucially, Camroux demonstrates that the *tatay* metaphor shields Duterte from accountability, recording state violence as household discipline rather than state overreach. This is particularly salient in Bong Go's prayer rally speech, where Duterte is portrayed not as a politician facing a legitimate international inquiry but as a wronged, vulnerable patriarch deserving loyalty and protection.

4. Cultural and journalistic contexts.

Journalistic and popular commentary further illuminate how the *tatay* metaphor shapes public sentiment. Jimenez-David (2017), writing in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, argued that Duterte's paternal image softens criticism by portraying him as a misunderstood but well-intentioned father. Regalado (2021) in *Spot.ph* highlighted how Filipinos frequently project family roles—*tatay*, *nanay*, *kuya*, *ate*—onto politicians, blurring the boundaries between governance and kinship.

However, other commentaries warn of the dangers. *Get Real Philippines* (2017) cautioned that viewing Duterte as a *tatay* infantilizes citizens and undermines critical political engagement. Aquino (2019) in *BusinessWorld* observed that Duterte's enduring appeal is rooted more in emotional pathos than in measurable policy achievements, suggesting that affective loyalty can override democratic accountability.

Taken together, these studies reveal that the *Tatay Digong* metaphor operates at the intersection of Filipino cultural values, populist performance, and metaphorical framing. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) explains how the abstract domain of governance and legal accountability (e.g., ICC scrutiny) is mapped onto the concrete and emotionally resonant domain of family life. Prototype Theory (Allan, 2015) elucidates why Duterte is perceived as fitting the Filipino mental model of an ideal father—protective, sacrificial, morally grounded—thus rendering the metaphor both persuasive and enduring.

Musolff's (2016) metaphor scenario framework further clarifies how this framing generates moral narratives that legitimize loyalty and obscure accountability. Camroux's (2022) insights on punitive populism demonstrate how familial metaphors function not merely as rhetoric but as political technologies that reconcile violence with care, intimacy with exclusion.

This multi-layered theoretical grounding directly informs this study's analysis of Bong Go's prayer rally speech. By tracing how the *tatay* metaphor is invoked in a moment of Duterte's political vulnerability, this research examines how familial metaphors transform legal controversies into affective narratives, thereby revealing the emotional.

II. METHODS

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach, which is appropriate for examining how meanings emerge from language within specific sociocultural contexts. Unlike quantitative content analysis, which focuses on frequency counts, qualitative content analysis allows for the interpretation of latent meanings, rhetorical structures, and discursive functions (Schreier, 2012). Specifically, this study uses conventional content analysis, a type of inductive method where coding categories are derived directly from the text data rather than from preconceived theories or frameworks (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

This design is particularly suited for exploring metaphors in political speech, as metaphors are not merely linguistic flourishes but function as cultural scripts and ideological frames. By analyzing how the metaphor “*Tatay Digong*” is deployed in a political speech, the study investigates how language shapes emotional and moral perceptions in a politically charged context.

B. Data Source and Sampling

This research makes use of a single, primary text: a speech delivered by Senator Christopher “Bong” Go during a prayer rally for former President Rodrigo Duterte on March 15, 2023, held at Liwasang Bonifacio, Manila. The video recording of this speech was accessed via YouTube and was manually transcribed to ensure fidelity to its verbal and emotional content.

The sampling strategy employed is purposive sampling, chosen for its ability to yield “information-rich” cases (Patton, 2002). This particular speech was selected due to three key factors: (1) it directly addresses Duterte’s legal troubles with the International Criminal Court (ICC), making it socio-politically relevant; (2) it repeatedly invokes the metaphor “*Tatay Digong*”, making it central to the research problem; and (3) it reflects Senator Go’s close personal and political ties to Duterte, offering insight into the discursive strategies of the Duterte political circle.

While the study does not aim for statistical generalization, it offers transferable insights into how metaphor, emotion, and political identity intersect in Philippine populist discourse. The rich, illustrative nature of this single speech enables a deep analysis that can inform future studies involving other speeches, public commentaries, or social media interactions.

C. Unit of Analysis

Rather than employing human subjects in the conventional sense, this study treats discourse itself as the object of analysis. In particular, Senator Bong Go is considered the primary discourse contributor, whose rhetorical choices serve to construct, reinforce, and circulate the metaphor of “*Tatay Digong*.” His speech is treated not simply as a personal reflection but as a strategic discursive performance shaped by broader ideological and cultural forces.

D. Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed a five-stage process, grounded in inductive coding and guided by the study's theoretical framework. First, the researcher engaged in a process of familiarization and segmentation. The transcript of Senator Bong Go's speech was read and reread to gain immersion in its rhythm, tone, and thematic contours. Particular attention was given to sections containing references to "*Tatay Digong*," as well as instances of familial imagery, emotional appeals, and moral judgments. These sections were identified as key units of analysis.

Second, an open-coding procedure was applied. Codes were generated inductively from the data rather than imposed a priori. For example, statements such as "*wala siyang tsinelas*" and "*hindi binibigay ang gamot*" were coded under Victimhood Framing, while the declaration "*hindi ko siya iiwan hanggang sa kamatayan*" was categorized as a Loyalty Signal. Other emergent codes included Emotional Blackmail, Familial Framing, and Moral Legitimacy.

Third, these codes were clustered into broader thematic categories, following Musolff's (2016) concept of metaphor scenarios—narrative structures in which metaphors shape moral interpretation. The identified categories included Sacrifice and Suffering, Filial Loyalty and Betrayal, Paternal Framing of Leadership, and National Grief and Solidarity.

Fourth, the themes were interpreted through the study's two central theoretical lenses. Prototype Theory of Meaning (Allan, 2015) was used to examine how Duterte was rhetorically constructed to align with the Filipino prototype of an ideal father—morally upright, protective, and sacrificial (Alampay, 2013). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was applied to analyze how abstract political processes, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation, were mapped onto concrete familial schemas, such as protecting one's father. This mapping reframed legal accountability as an act of emotional injustice.

Finally, validation and reflexivity were incorporated throughout the process. Emergent codes and themes were cross validated against existing literature on Filipino values, including *utang na loob*, *pakikipagkapwa*, and *pagmamahal sa pamilya*, as well as against studies of political rhetoric. The findings were triangulated with media discourse and scholarly commentary to ensure cultural resonance. The researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging the influence of personal biases, political sensitivities, and cultural embeddedness on the analysis. Rather than claiming objective neutrality, the study situates its interpretations within a broader interpretive framework that recognizes the subjective dimensions of discourse analysis

E. Ethical Considerations

As this study does not involve human participants but rather analyzes publicly available speech and discourse, it does not require formal ethical clearance. Nonetheless, care was taken to maintain respectful representation, especially considering the politically sensitive nature of the topic.

III. RESULTS

The analysis of Senator Bong Go's prayer rally speech revealed that the metaphor "*Tatay Digong*" functions as more than an affectionate nickname; it serves as the central rhetorical device around which the entire narrative of Duterte's plight is constructed. In line with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the speech frames politics and leadership through the familiar schema of Filipino fatherhood. The metaphor "DUTERTE IS A FATHER" is deployed consistently, inviting the audience to perceive Duterte not as a political leader facing international scrutiny but as a familial patriarch enduring unjust suffering.

In response to the first research subproblem—*What recurring themes and rhetorical strategies accompany the metaphor "Tatay Digong" in political discourse related to Duterte's ICC investigation?*—four prominent rhetorical strategies emerged: constructing suffering and vulnerability, appealing to loyalty through *utang na loob*, infusing religious and destiny framing, and repeating personal anecdotes to deepen familial intimacy.

The speech frequently emphasizes Duterte's frailty and neglect through vivid imagery: "*wala siyang tsinelas*," "*hindi binibigay ang gamot*," "*nakatungkod*." These depictions reposition Duterte from being a former strongman president to a helpless, aging father figure in need of protection. Furthermore, Bong Go repeatedly appeals to the moral obligation of loyalty, invoking *utang na loob* through statements like "*pinansin kayo ni Tatay Digong*," and "*nakakatulog pa ba kayo?*"—thus, reframing political support as a question of moral character rather than ideology (Alampay, 2013).

The speech also sacralizes Duterte's political life by presenting it as providential. By describing his presidency as "destiny" and culminating with his favorite spiritual song, "You Raise Me Up," Go constructs a quasi-religious narrative, framing Duterte's current ordeal as a collective moral and spiritual trial. Finally, Go's deliberate use of personal anecdotes, such as Duterte being barefoot on a cold plane or Kitty Duterte asking him to act as her "*tatay-for-now*," deepens the familial metaphor and humanizes Duterte's plight.

These rhetorical strategies consistently reinforce the metaphorical structure of Duterte as *tatay*, which effectively shifts the audience's attention away from the ICC's legal case and toward an intimate narrative of familial loyalty and emotional injustice. In this framing, the ICC is no longer a neutral legal institution but an intrusive outsider disrupting the sacred unity of a family.

Addressing the second research subproblem—*How do supporters interpret and reproduce the metaphor "Tatay Digong," and what does this reveal about affective political loyalty?*—the findings show that the metaphor resonates because it aligns with the Filipino cultural prototype of fatherhood, which involves strength, sacrifice, and moral authority (Alampay, 2013). Bong Go's narrative of Duterte's ongoing medical struggles, his willingness to "face" his situation despite threats, and his refusal to flee the country all reinforce his image as a devoted patriarch. This activates a cognitive shortcut, allowing supporters to transfer real-world feelings about their own fathers onto Duterte. Through Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this metaphorical mapping between *family* and *politics* transforms civic criticism into emotional betrayal.

The collective language—“*tayong mga Pilipino*,” “*nangungulila ang bayan*,” “*ipagdasal natin si Tatay Digong*”—further amplifies the metaphor, positioning the nation as Duterte’s grieving children. Even Kitty Duterte’s private grief becomes emblematic of the national emotional state, allowing personal pain to stand in for collective mourning. These rhetorical elements generate a powerful affective bond that insulates Duterte from critique and reframes institutional accountability as a moral injustice.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal how the metaphor “*Tatay Digong*” functions as both a cultural and rhetorical device that reframes Rodrigo Duterte’s ICC controversies into a deeply personal narrative of familial loyalty. By analyzing Senator Bong Go’s prayer rally speech, this study demonstrates how Duterte is not simply defended as a political figure but mythologized as a paternal protector whose suffering demands empathy rather than legal judgment. This section elaborates on the significance of each identified theme, connecting them to relevant literature and broader patterns of populist communication.

A. Suffering and Vulnerability as a Strategic Frame

The first and perhaps most striking theme in Bong Go’s speech is the construction of Duterte’s suffering and vulnerability. Through vivid and emotionally charged imagery—“*wala siyang tsinelas*,” “*hindi binibigay ang gamot*,” “*nakatungkod*”—Duterte is framed as a frail, aging father who has been denied dignity and care. In this framing, the ICC is not an impartial legal institution but an outsider disrupting a sacred family bond.

This resonates with Musolff’s (2016) idea of metaphor scenarios, where metaphors do not exist in isolation but create coherent moral and social worlds. In the “*tatay*” scenario, the people become children, and Duterte’s suffering becomes a moral indictment of those who abandon their familial duties. Such a strategy is not unique to the Philippines; similar techniques were seen in Viktor Orbán’s speeches in Hungary, where international criticism is reframed as unjustified foreign interference in national “family” matters.

The rhetorical emphasis on vulnerability also reflects Thompson’s (2016) argument that Duterte’s authoritarian populism paradoxically relies on displays of both strength and frailty. As a former strongman now rendered physically weak, Duterte embodies a complex figure, both feared and pitied. This duality sustains the audience’s affective attachment, enabling them to see his past violence not as cruelty but as paternal discipline.

B. Loyalty and Utang na Loob as Moral Obligation

A second theme is the appeal to loyalty through *utang na loob*—a deeply embedded Filipino cultural script that demands reciprocity for past kindness. Bong Go repeatedly reminds his audience of Duterte’s previous acts of political support—“*pinansin kayo ni Tatay Digong*,” “*hindi namin kayo pinabayaan*,” “*nakakatulog pa ba kayo?*”—transforming what might otherwise be transactional political alliances into enduring moral obligations.

Alampay (2013) explains that Filipino familial relationships are heavily shaped by *utang na loob*, where acts of care or protection create an implicit debt that must be repaid. By framing Duterte as *tatay*, Bong Go activates this moral economy, effectively shifting the audience's perception of support from political loyalty to moral duty.

This rhetorical strategy echoes Canovan's (1999) concept of the redemptive face of populism, where leaders bypass institutional processes by directly appealing to the people's emotions. It also mirrors similar populist tactics used by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, who frequently invoked his sacrifices for the "Brazilian family" to demand loyalty amid corruption allegations. The danger of such appeals is that they obscure accountability by binding political allegiance to cultural notions of honor and reciprocity.

C. Religious and Destiny Framing: Sacralizing Leadership

A third theme in the speech is the integration of religious and destiny framing. Duterte's presidency is described as "destiny," and Bong Go concludes the rally with the spiritual hymn "You Raise Me Up." This sacralizes Duterte's political life, transforming his ICC ordeal into a quasi-religious trial rather than a legal investigation.

This aligns with Canovan's (1999) observation that populism often carries a messianic dimension, where leaders are seen as chosen figures intimately connected to "the people." Duterte's suffering is thus reframed not merely as political persecution but as a moral and spiritual test for the nation. This strategy mirrors the religious undertones used by leaders like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, who frequently frames his political journey as divinely ordained.

The sacralization of Duterte's leadership also resonates with Thompson's (2016) analysis of how Duterte's violent policies were legitimized as necessary acts of care. By invoking destiny and faith, Bong Go reinforces the perception that Duterte's choices – no matter how controversial – are ultimately beyond the realm of ordinary judgment.

D. Personal Anecdotes and the Performance of Intimacy

The speech also relies heavily on personal anecdotes to humanize Duterte and deepen the familial metaphor. Stories such as Duterte being barefoot on a cold plane, receiving a jacket from a co-pilot, or Kitty Duterte calling Bong Go her "tatay-for-now" create an illusion of intimacy between the audience and Duterte.

This aligns with Moffitt's (2016) concept of populism as performance, where emotional authenticity is deliberately enacted to foster identification with the leader. Bong Go's repetition of these anecdotes, accompanied by visible emotionality, is not incidental but a calculated performative act that strengthens the narrative of Duterte as a beloved patriarch. Similarly, Donald Trump's campaign rallies in the United States often featured personal stories of "ordinary Americans" wronged by elites, reinforcing his image as a protector of the common man.

These anecdotes also serve as what Barthes (1972) calls mythic signifiers – ordinary details that become charged with symbolic meaning. Duterte's barefoot image, for example, is no longer just about physical vulnerability; it signifies moral innocence and undeserved suffering, inviting empathy rather than critique.

E. Emotional Loyalty and the Risks to Accountability

Finally, the speech reveals the risks of emotional loyalty in populist politics. By framing Duterte as *tatay*, Bong Go converts political judgment into familial loyalty, thereby neutralizing legal scrutiny. Criticism of Duterte becomes not a civic act but an act of betrayal – akin to abandoning one’s own father.

This emotional reframing mirrors the strategies used by Donald Trump, who dismissed legal investigations as “witch hunts,” and Bolsonaro, who framed his corruption cases as attacks on his family and supporters. In all these cases, affective attachment overrides institutional reasoning, eroding the public’s trust in independent accountability mechanisms.

As Musolff (2016) warns, metaphors shape not only how political events are understood but also how they are morally evaluated. When the state is imagined as a family, leaders can claim moral authority even in the face of legal wrongdoing. The “*Tatay Digong*” metaphor, therefore, does not simply describe Duterte; it actively reconstructs his legitimacy, enabling his supporters to reinterpret controversial policies as paternal care.

V. CONCLUSION

The metaphor “*Tatay Digong*” exemplifies the immense power of language to reconfigure political meaning in a culturally resonant way. It does not merely describe Duterte; it constructs and protects his image, embedding him within the moral and emotional framework of the Filipino family. In Bong Go’s speech, Duterte is no longer a politician facing potential legal accountability; he is reframed as a patriarch wronged by outsiders, a suffering father deserving not scrutiny but sympathy and loyalty.

This finding reflects a deeper truth about the Philippine socio-political landscape. In a nation where familial values and kinship ties often eclipse institutional reasoning, the metaphor of *tatay* operates as a bridge between personal affection and political allegiance. It taps into cultural scripts of *utang na loob* and moral reciprocity, blurring the boundaries between governance and family, between public duty and private loyalty. As a result, emotional attachment supplants civic rationality, weakening the capacity for democratic accountability.

This rhetorical strategy mirrors a global populist trend. As in Russia, Brazil, Turkey, and the United States, populist leaders deliberately perform authenticity, crisis, and intimacy to cultivate loyalty. Duterte, like Trump or Bolsonaro, uses the language of persecution and familial care to create a moral shield against legal and ethical scrutiny. Yet, in the Philippine case, this dynamic is amplified by the country’s unique cultural affinity for familial metaphors, making the “*tatay*” persona especially powerful and enduring.

The implications are profound. When leaders are framed as parental figures, their policies – even those marked by violence or authoritarian excess – are recast as acts of care and protection. Legal criticism becomes emotionally illegitimate; institutional processes are dismissed as meddling; and citizens, positioned as children, are

discouraged from questioning the “father.” This is the danger of affective populism: it breeds unquestioning loyalty at the expense of democratic vigilance.

The study ultimately reveals a political paradox. While familial metaphors like *tatay* evoke solidarity, empathy, and moral obligation, they can also be exploited to obscure truth, normalize authoritarianism, and erode the very foundations of democratic governance. Understanding and interrogating such metaphors is thus crucial not only for academic inquiry but for the future of political discourse in the Philippines.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings of this study, several forward-looking recommendations can be made for scholarship, civic education, and public discourse.

First, future research should extend the metaphor-focused analysis to other forms of political discourse. While this study centered on a single speech by Senator Bong Go, applying the same methodological approach to other speeches by Rodrigo Duterte and his allies – as well as to the dynamic sphere of online interactions among Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) – could yield valuable insights. Examining how the “*Tatay Digong*” metaphor circulates in social media memes, comment threads, and hashtags would shed light on how political metaphors evolve, adapt, and gain momentum in digital spaces.

Second, a comparative analysis across leaders and metaphors could broaden the scope of understanding. For instance, juxtaposing “*Tatay Digong*” with other familial political framings in the Philippine context, such as “Mama Leni” for Vice President Leni Robredo or “Inday Sara” for Vice President Sara Duterte, could reveal how gendered metaphors influence political loyalty, moral framing, and emotional appeal differently. This line of inquiry would deepen understanding of how notions of motherhood and fatherhood are mobilized in political rhetoric.

Third, there is value in examining audience reception more directly. This study primarily analyzed rhetorical strategies from the perspective of the speaker, but ethnographic interviews, focus groups, or digital discourse analysis could explore how supporters interpret, reproduce, and emotionally inhabit these metaphors in everyday life. Such work would enrich our understanding of how affective loyalty is sustained and negotiated outside the formal political stage.

Fourth, the findings underscore the need to promote critical language awareness. Educators, media practitioners, and civic organizations can play a crucial role in fostering critical media and language literacy, enabling citizens to recognize how political metaphors shape perception, judgment, and moral alignment. By demystifying the emotional power of familial metaphors, civic education can help citizens engage more thoughtfully with political discourse and resist forms of emotional manipulation that weaken democratic accountability.

Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration should be encouraged. Scholars from linguistics, political science, sociology, and cultural studies would benefit from pooling their analytical tools to study political language in the Philippines more holistically. Such an approach would better illuminate the intersections of culture, affect, and power, generating richer analyses and actionable insights for strengthening democratic discourse in the country.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study focuses exclusively on one primary text: a transcribed speech by Senator Christopher “Bong” Go, delivered at a prayer rally for former President Rodrigo Duterte on March 15, 2023, in Liwasang Bonifacio, Manila. The analysis centers on how the metaphor “*Tatay Digong*” is used within this speech to frame Duterte in the context of his legal controversies with the International Criminal Court (ICC). While the metaphor’s broader usage also appears in digital discourse and everyday conversation, this study limits its scope to formal political speech as a site of metaphor performance and affective framing.

The study does not aim to make empirical claims about the attitudes of the entire Filipino public nor generalize findings to all instances of familial metaphors in politics. Rather, it provides an in-depth, culturally grounded discourse analysis of a single speech to highlight how metaphors operate ideologically and emotionally in times of political crisis. Furthermore, while the speech is publicly available and easily accessible online, the study limits its data to the spoken content itself and does not include video analysis of tone, gesture, or crowd interaction, although these elements undoubtedly contribute to the speech's full impact.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology and theoretical lenses allow for a rich, layered understanding of how metaphor, culture, and power intersect in the performance of populist discourse in the Philippines.

This study contributes to a deeper and more critical understanding of how metaphors—particularly familial ones—are weaponized in the performance of populism in the Philippines. By examining how former President Rodrigo Duterte is framed as “*Tatay Digong*,” the research sheds light on how language not only reflects culture but is used strategically to stir emotion, build identity, and shield power from critique. This framing taps into deeply rooted Filipino values such as *pagmamahal sa pamilya*, *utang na loob*, and *pagpapakasakit*, mobilizing them not in private life but in the public arena of politics.

As the Philippines continues to grapple with the legacies of populist leadership, it becomes increasingly clear that language is not merely reflective but constitutive of political reality. Metaphors like “*Tatay Digong*” do more than humanize leaders; they reshape the moral landscape of governance, forging affective bonds that can either strengthen solidarity or weaken accountability.

The struggle for democratic resilience in the Philippines will require more than institutional reform. It demands a deeper cultural reckoning with how familial

metaphors and emotional narratives have been used to justify violence, sidestep justice, and entrench power. Understanding these rhetorical strategies is not an academic luxury – it is a political necessity, a way to safeguard truth and rebuild trust in democratic institutions.

By critically interrogating metaphors like “*Tatay Digong*,” this study contributes to a broader conversation on how we, as citizens and scholars, can reclaim political discourse from the grip of emotional manipulation. In doing so, it gestures toward a future where leaders are held accountable not as distant patriarchs but as public servants bound by the principles of justice, transparency, and the collective good.

VII. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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