

Seeding Discontent: How China-linked Actors and Influencers are Reframing the Anti-Corruption Protests in the Philippines

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Image credit: Black Forest Labs FLUX.2

Background

In July 2025, President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos (PBBM) revealed how many of the flood control projects were failures,¹ leading to disastrous consequences for many Filipinos. In a country besieged by natural disasters, risk reduction and management is essential to saving lives and livelihood. For decades, the Philippines has had to survive extreme flooding, brought about by weather conditions that are exacerbated by climate change.

Since then, the government has taken steps to investigate the massive corruption behind these projects. The Filipino people responded with outrage, and on September 21, 2025,

¹ Luisa Cabato, “Sona 2025: Marcos on corrupt people in flood control deals: ‘Shame on you’”, Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 28, 2025, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2088472/sona-2025-marcos-on-corrupt-people-in-flood-control-deals-shame-on-you>

conducted massive protests in several areas of the country.² Tragically, some of the protests escalated into violent riots that led to injuries and 2 deaths.^{3,4,5}

Methodology

We used Pamment's ABCDE Framework⁶ to guide our investigation, and the DISARM Red Framework⁷ to codify the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) we observed. To deepen our analysis, we also sought out inauthentic account amplification, specifically those related to a fabricated NED memo. We did this by examining known pro-PRC local influencers on Facebook, manually documenting their posts, sharers, and commenters. We then analyzed these accounts and gave them scores using weighted indicators of inauthenticity. To facilitate our investigation, we utilized tools such as Google Pinpoint AI (for video transcription), Google Sheets, the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, Archive Today, and SingleFile (for archiving our observations), Adobe Photoshop and Miro to present and organize our findings, and reverse image search tools such as Google Lens and Yandex to trace the source of media. To describe the effect of the incident, the Brookings Breakout Scale was used.⁸

In examining the accounts to classify them as authentic or inauthentic, we employed a quantitative method to improve objectivity. We assigned weights to commonly used metrics and signals of inauthenticity, based on previous investigations in investigating inauthentic accounts. Some examples of metrics we used include suspicious names like ones made with fantasy name generators, suspicious profile photos (e.g., AI-generated, stolen), having few to no original media, suspicious bios like generic text, bad follower:following ratios, and suspicious posting times and speeds, which can indicate bot-like behavior.

Using a spreadsheet, we manually analyzed 645 accounts that shared or commented on Cruz's post. Each entry was then given binary scores in the style of a checklist, with "1" signifying a tick in the cell, which would then be multiplied by the weight below the column

² Paterno Esmaque II, "Luneta, People Power Monument rallies set for September 21", Rappler, September 12, 2025,

<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/luneta-people-power-monument-protests-september-21-2025/>

³ "Clashes, arrests as tens of thousands protest corruption in Philippines", Al Jazeera, September 21, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/21/thousands-rally-in-philippines-at-anticorruption-protests-in-manila>

⁴ Darylle Sarmiento and Izzy Lee, "1 'male protester' dies from stabbing, 1 injured during Mendiola protest", ABS-CBN News, September 22, 2025,

<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/9/22/1-male-protester-dies-from-stabbing-1-injured-during-mendiola-protest-0921>

⁵ Kenneth Roland Guda and Avon Ang, "Stray bullet victim in Mendiola protest was a bystander, says witness", Bulatlat, Sep 26, 2025,

<https://www.bulatlat.com/2025/09/26/stray-bullet-victim-in-mendiola-protest-was-a-bystander-says-witness>

⁶ https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Pamment_-_Future_Threats.pdf

⁷ <https://www.disarm.foundation/framework>

⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-breakout-scale-measuring-the-impact-of-influence-operations/>

header, and tallied up with a formula in the last column with the total weighted score. Based on their total scores, the accounts were classified as “likely authentic”, “low likelihood inauthentic”, “medium likelihood inauthentic”, and “high likelihood inauthentic”.

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1	1		1	1	21	h	
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Figure 3: Weighted metrics of inauthenticity. Top rows showed the common indicators of authenticity. The total weighted score is used to classify the likelihood of inauthenticity.

Due to limited time and resources, the investigation focused on Facebook, as it is the most commonly used social media platform in the Philippines with 95.8 million users out of an Internet population of 98.0 million.⁹ This puts Facebook’s penetration rate at 97.75% of the Internet population of the Philippines. Data was also manually gathered as opposed to using automation or APIs, which added a layer of difficulty to the investigation. The investigation also focused on inauthenticity of accounts, rather than coordination due to time and resource constraints.

Findings

Following the September 21, 2025 protests, PRC state-controlled and state-aligned actors began reframing the protests. On the day of the protests, a news report from state-controlled media added public dissatisfaction over “geopolitical games” played by the Philippine-government, a narrative that was never mentioned either in the rallies or in the placards carried by the rallyists. Days after the protests, foreign actors who have historically amplified pro-PRC stances and local PRC-affiliated organizations and individuals started circulating the narrative that the protests were

⁹ Simon Kemp, “Digital 2026: The Philippines”, Datareportal, November 5, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-philippines>

US-backed. Notably, a fabricated memo from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was shared by pro-Duterte vloggers who also spread pro-PRC stances. It was shared by a local celebrity and personalities with significant reach and influence.

Attributing the protests to the United States is not a new narrative. The same was said about the 2020 Thailand protest¹⁰ and recent movements in Indonesia and Nepal.¹¹ In a 2021 interview with CGTN, a China state-controlled media outlet, Brian Berletic alleged that the different opposition movements from “violent mobs” in SouthEast Asia and Hong Kong were funded by the United States through organizations such as NED. He described the protests as a “larger, long-term goal of encircling, containing, and undermining China in a bid to maintain American hegemony across Asia”.¹² Berletic is a state-aligned pro-PRC and pro-Russian influencer who presents himself as an ex-military personnel (T0097.105).¹³ U.S. skepticism is a meta-narrative that is prevalent in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) operations in the Indo-Pacific. Specifically, it emphasizes that the U.S. cannot be trusted and will always advance its own interests, despite the harm done even to its partners, such as the Philippines.

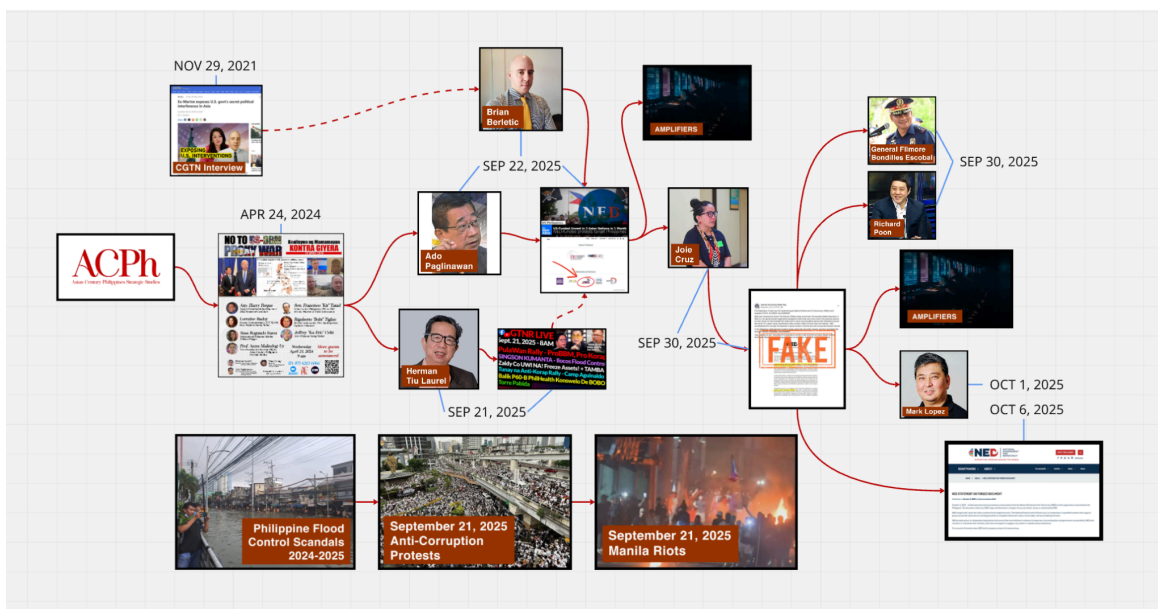


Figure 1: Narrative flows from state-aligned actors and influencers on the 2025 September 21 Philippine anti-corruption protests

¹⁰ Yu Qun, “Behind-scenes funding of Thailand protests show invisible Western hands”, Global Times, October 21, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1204212.shtml>

¹¹ Brian Berletic, “Copy & Paste: US-Sponsored Unrest Now Targets Philippines”, X.com, September 21, 2025, <https://archive.md/H0v7r>

¹² Li Jingjing, “Ex-Marine exposes U.S. govt's secret political interference in Asia”, CGTN, November 29, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-11-29/Ex-Marine-exposes-U-S-govt-s-secret-political-interference-in-Asia-15z8CfeCUEw/index.html>

¹³ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0097.105.md

Sub-narratives included framing PBBM as a U.S. lackey, and that the September 21 protest was U.S.-funded and U.S.-instigated violence. Relatedly, there are narratives on how the U.S. is destabilizing the Marcos administration because he is much less willing to be a U.S. proxy. This is also not a new narrative, as something similar was documented in Doublethink Lab's investigation in 2024.¹⁴ Considering these narratives, it could be inferred that the primary objective was to use the narratives on the protests to gain domestic political advantage (T0074.001)¹⁵ by degrading PBBM (T0066)¹⁶ and geopolitical advantage (T0074.001)¹⁷ by promoting US skepticism.

From the narratives and content in this incident, we determined that one of the main objectives is to advance geopolitical interest (T0074.001: Geopolitical Advantage), by undermining the reputation of the U.S. and promoting skepticism, as well as degrading (T0066: Degrade Adversary) the current president, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. The actors identified above present themselves as experts (T0097.108: Expert Persona) and journalists (T0097.102: Journalist Persona), lending credibility to their opinions. Berletic also presents himself as an ex-military personnel (T0097.105: Military Personnel Persona).

The main actors involved in this incident were local PRC-aligned organizations and personalities that present themselves as experts (T0097.108)¹⁸ and journalists (T0097.102)¹⁹, as well as other local and foreign influencers who have been previously identified as seeders and amplifiers of PRC propaganda. On YouTube, Global Talk News Radio (GTNR), another PRC-aligned channel with 43k followers on Facebook and 66.5K subscribers on YouTube, posted an episode regarding the protests which reached 3.3K views as of February 2026.²⁰ PRC-aligned actors are defined as, "cannot be directly attributed to state control or funding and therefore remain unattributed but show systematic signs of alignment with a state entity".²¹

¹⁴ "Weaponizing the Sinovac Slander: Online CIB against the United States and the Philippine President", Doublethink Lab, December 4, 2024

<https://medium.com/doublethinklab/weaponizing-the-sinovac-slander-online-cib-against-the-united-states-and-the-philippine-president-6bce4d5214e3>

¹⁵ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0074.002.md

¹⁶ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0066.md

¹⁷ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0074.001.md

¹⁸ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0097.108.md

¹⁹ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0097.102.md

²⁰ <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2025/EEAS-3rd-ThreatReport-March-2025-05-Digital-HD.pdf>

²¹ "PulaWan Luneta Rally Pro-BBM Pro-Korap | Amerikano sa Camp Aguinaldo?", Global Talk News Radio, September 21, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOqvWBcwHLY>, archive link: <https://archive.org/details/gtnr-pula-wan-luneta-rally>

Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute (ACPh)²² is a PRC-aligned²³ self-described think tank that has produced limited verifiable research.²⁴ Ado Paglinawan, Vice President for International Affairs of ACPh, shared a YouTube video from The New Atlas that was spreading the conspiracy theory (T0022.001)²⁵ that the U.S. was instigating protests in Asia through NED.²⁶

The New Atlas YouTube channel is run by Berletic. On the day of the September 21 anti-corruption protests, he spread the U.S.-NED-funded destabilization conspiracy narrative through his X account which garnered 28.9K views,²⁷ and through a second X post²⁸ sharing the video previously mentioned. As of February 2026, Berletic had 120.9K followers on X²⁹ and 302K subscribers on The New Atlas which garnered 56k views.³⁰

The most notable observable that the investigation focused on was a post by pro-Duterte influencer Elizabeth Joie “De Vivre” Cruz who has 266K Facebook followers. Cruz is associated with ACPh, having been a “political observer” at one of its forums in 2024.³¹ On September 30, 2025, she posted a falsified NED memo (T0089.003)³² and accused the organization of funding the September 21 protests and having a hand in the violence which occurred during the demonstrations later that day.³³ As of February 2026, Cruz’s post had 277 comments and 1K shares. It was shared by prominent figures who have significant influence and following online, including Retired Police General Filmore Bondilles Escobal³⁴ (248K followers) and celebrity Richard Poon (565K followers).³⁵ Another Pro-Duterte influencer, Mark Lopez (247K followers), shared the same image on his Facebook wall a day later.³⁶ NED released a statement denouncing the memo as a forgery.³⁷

²² “No to US-BBM Proxy War”, Asian Century Ph Journal, April 23, 2024, <https://archive.md/n9mlc>

²³ Camille Elemia, “Philippines confronts unlikely adversary in SCS row: Filipinos echoing ‘pro-Beijing’ narratives”, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, October 23, 2023, <https://pcij.org/2023/10/23/philippines-confronts-unlikely-adversary-south-china-sea-row-filipinos-echo-pro-beijing-narratives/>. “I don’t mind being linked with China because many in the world want to be linked with China... ..China picks up information and content from us. We also pick it up from them”, Herman Tiu Laurel, ACPh president

²⁴ Pauline Macaraeg, “How pro-China propaganda is seeded online in the Philippines”, The Nerve, January 23, 2025, <https://www.thenerve.co/story/ways-how-china-propaganda-seeded-online-philippines>

²⁵ https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0022.001.md

²⁶ Brian Berletic, “US-Funded Unrest Targets 3 Asian Nations in 1 Month - Now Targeting the Philippines”, The New Atlas (YouTube), September 22, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAlKv4zawlg>, archive link: <https://archive.org/details/us-funded-unrest-targets-3-asian-nations>

²⁷ <https://archive.md/H0v7r>

²⁸ <https://archive.md/sG5uu>

²⁹ <https://x.com/BrianJBerletic>

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/c/TheNewAtlas>

³¹ “Upholding a Shared Future to Build a World of Peaceful Coexistence – AsianCenturyPH.com Forum”, Asian Century Ph Journal, October 3, 2024, <https://archive.md/bq7LQ>

³² https://github.com/DISARMFoundation/DISARMframeworks/blob/main/generated_pages/techniques/T0089.003.md

³³ <https://archive.md/t1LqW>

³⁴ <https://archive.md/3QzXL>

³⁵ <https://archive.md/kaHFq>

³⁶ <https://archive.md/w0MNI>

³⁷ “NED Statement on Forged Document”, National Endowment for Democracy, October 6, 2025, <https://www.ned.org/ned-statement-on-forged-document/>

August 25, 2025

Subject: Strengthening Philippine Government Officials Accountability

Pursuant to the project Strengthening Philippine Government Officials Accountability since July 2025, NED prioritizes the promotion of Philippines' anti-corruption efforts, with the objective of enhancing accountability and transparency within public discourse

Under the project's funding and guidance, Rappler, Vera Files, and the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism have conducted a series of confidential and in-depth investigations, gathering evidence of corruption involving public officials, with a particular focus on irregularities in flood control projects - who have owned, currently own, or whose family member owns, a company that wins government flood control project contracts from 2016 to 2025.

At this critical juncture, corruption has profoundly undermined national development. It erodes the government's capacity to govern effectively, stifles economic growth and social advancement, and exacerbates the divide between the wealthy and the marginalized. This pervasive corruption also diminishes public trust and confidence in government, disrupts harmonious cooperation with the international community, and deters foreign investment and collaboration opportunities essential to the country's progress.

Confronted with this severe challenge, Non-Government Organizations, including Akbayan, Bayan, Karapatan, Kabataan, must take a pivotal role in harnessing anti-corruption issues to galvanize public awareness, activate democratic movements through robust youth political engagement, leverage public opinion to enhance government accountability and social governance, and steer national development back on a progressive path.

NED will focus advocacy on youth, students and workers as primary groups addressing the anti-corruption issue, and support and mobilize to organize protests, including more radical and confrontational actions on 21 September the anniversary of the declaration of martial law. This strategic timing aims to capture more attention, raise widespread awareness and understanding of corruption, inspire greater participation in the democratic anti-corruption movement, and amplify demands for accountability and transparency.

In this process, NED emphasized timely communication to ensure all participating organizations are aligned, well-informed, and supported throughout the movement. The aforesaid information is hereby submitted for your reference.

Please restrict the scope of those with access to this information.

Sincerely,



Damon Wilson
President and CEO
National Endowment for Democracy

Figure 2: Fabricated NED memo about the September 21 anti-corruption protests mentioned supporting and mobilizing organized protests, including "more radical and confrontational actions"

[Democracy.Net.PH](https://democracy.net.ph) examined the accounts that commented on and shared Cruz’s post. Forty-seven (47) out of 392 (12%) publicly viewable shares were made by highly likely inauthentic accounts, while 41 out of 252 (16.2%) accounts that shared Cruz’s post were highly likely inauthentic. These inauthentic accounts amplify the U.S. interference narrative and further manipulate public perception (T0049.001: Trolls Amplify and Manipulate) by sharing and commenting on the forged NED memo. Inauthentic accounts amplify the U.S. interference narrative and further manipulate public perception (T0049.001: Trolls Amplify and Manipulate) by sharing and commenting on the forged NED memo.

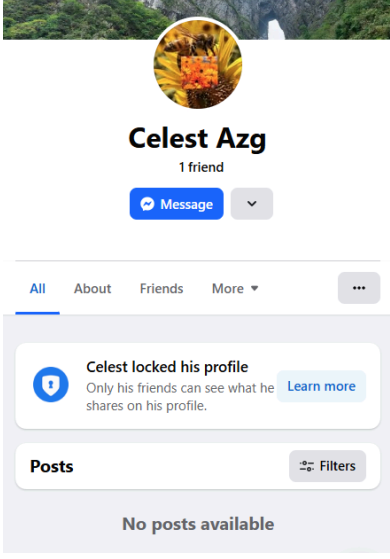
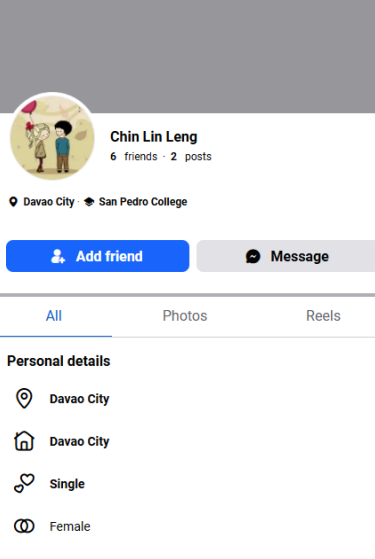
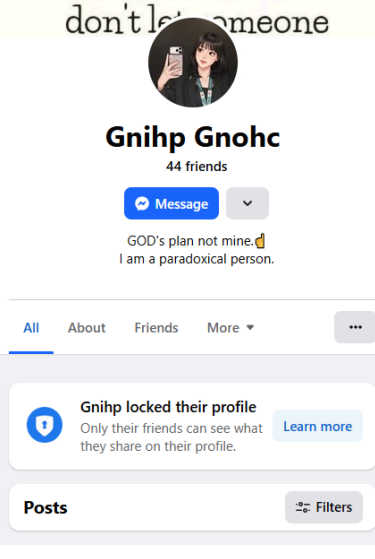
		
<p>Odd name, 1 friend yet actively comments, Locked profile, generic nature images for profile & cover photo³⁸</p>	<p>6 friends, stock profile photo, blank cover image, private profile³⁹</p>	<p>Odd name, low friend count, AI profile image, generic “fluff” bio & cover image, locked profile⁴⁰</p>

Figure 3: High likelihood inauthentic Cruz Facebook post commenter accounts

³⁸ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tD1T3ZbQHORqAE09l53PcGv6yboc-JtD/view?usp=sharing>

³⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qStXQ5Xqh7Womv1-MW88DQthJ7uvkUv8/view?usp=sharing>

⁴⁰ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y-bftz3vFph4B57zMvjtkc9-qkkVm78l/view?usp=sharing>

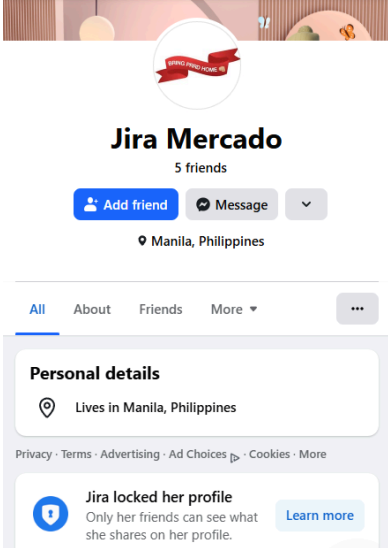
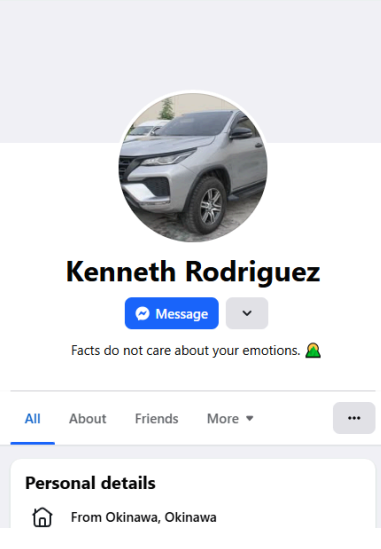
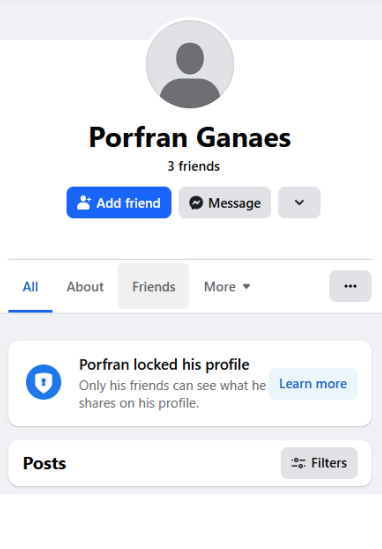
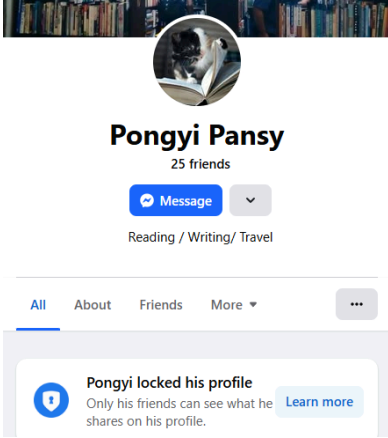
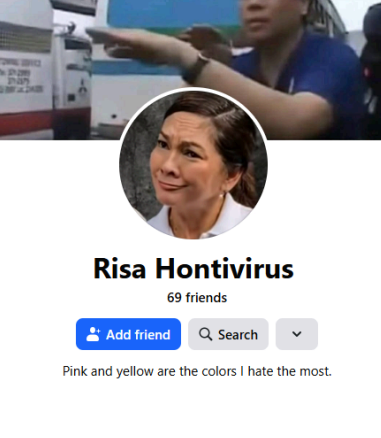
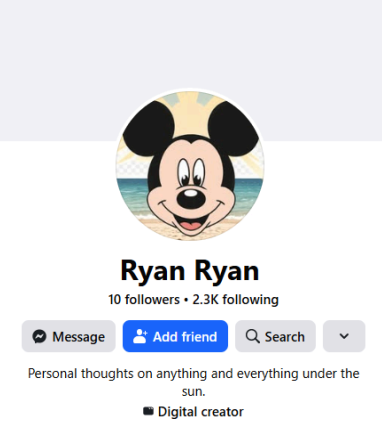
 <p>Jira Mercado 5 friends Add friend Message Manila, Philippines</p> <p>All About Friends More</p> <p>Personal details Lives in Manila, Philippines</p> <p>Jira locked her profile Only her friends can see what she shares on her profile.</p>	 <p>Kenneth Rodriguez Message Facts do not care about your emotions.</p> <p>All About Friends More</p> <p>Personal details From Okinawa, Okinawa</p>	 <p>Porfran Ganaes 3 friends Add friend Message</p> <p>All About Friends More</p> <p>Porfran locked his profile Only his friends can see what he shares on his profile.</p> <p>Posts Filters</p>
<p>5 friends, generic profile & cover photos, locked profile⁴¹</p>	<p>New account, borrowed profile photo, blank cover photo, generic fluff bio and posts⁴²</p>	<p>New account, odd name, 3 friends, blank profile and cover photo, locked profile⁴⁴</p>
 <p>Pongyi Pansy 25 friends Message Reading / Writing/ Travel</p> <p>All About Friends More</p> <p>Pongyi locked his profile Only his friends can see what he shares on his profile.</p>	 <p>Risa Hontivirus 69 friends Add friend Search Pink and yellow are the colors I hate the most.</p>	 <p>Ryan Ryan 10 followers • 2.3K following Message Add friend Search Personal thoughts on anything and everything under the sun. Digital creator</p>
<p>Odd name, stock profile images, 25 friends, locked account, generic bio⁴⁵</p>	<p>Pejorative name, few friends, borrowed political profile images, no original media, single purpose political account⁴⁶</p>	<p>Generic name, stock profile image, no cover photo, very bad follower:following ratio⁴⁷</p>

Figure 4: High likelihood inauthentic Cruz Facebook post commenter accounts

⁴¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1R3lrJlas0oo1MNM3u3yIS1Hvu-P_R-sD/view?usp=sharing

⁴² Profile photo source: <https://hmr.ph/lots/9-2021-toyota-fortuner-2-4-l-49dn2#/>

⁴³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y3xImpRTNAqrFecPOSduaCICD_fxKsAo/view?usp=sharing

⁴⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-EysFeQq2sLsDh_e5LosH1o7LQe3G15P/view?usp=sharing

⁴⁵ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16d0boKM5bQ-2Y9rsZcqCuobDA6QoSjwC/view?usp=sharing>

⁴⁶ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1riwFliiKfv6bL3EVwSKfoPC-HgqcgB0i/view?usp=sharing>

⁴⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nkGyL73GLj91-BSkG2rZU7GCi8io3U5M/view?usp=sharing>

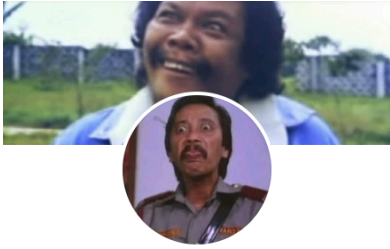
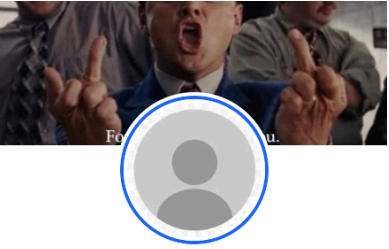



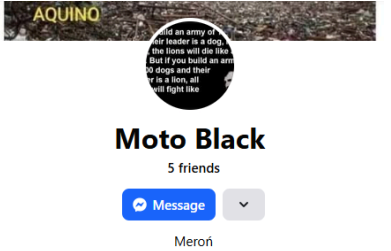
 <p>Ramon Cruz 294 followers • 926 following</p> <p>Message Follow Add friend</p> <p>Digital creator</p>	 <p>Badger Reyes 1 friend</p> <p>Add friend Message</p> <p>Lying is the worst thing you can do to another person Davao City</p>	 <p>Cloud Iye 37 friends</p> <p>Add friend Message</p> <p>University of Mindanao</p>
<p>Generic name, borrowed photos, bad follower:following ratio, no original content & poor post engagement⁴⁸</p>	<p>New account, odd name, no profile photo, borrowed cover photo, 1 friend, vanity URL mismatch⁴⁹</p>	<p>Few friends, stock profile photos, no original media & content, single purpose account⁵⁰</p>
 <p>Halies Grome 1 friend</p> <p>Message</p>	 <p>Mang Gancho @mang.gancho.2025 1 friend</p> <p>Add friend Message</p>	 <p>Moto Black 5 friends</p> <p>Message</p> <p>Meroñ Munich, Germany Don Bosco UP Dilliman</p>
<p>Odd name, 1 friend, suspicious posting speed & times, no original media, vanity URL mismatch⁵¹</p>	<p>Pejorative slang name, 1 friend, generic profile images, no original media, single purpose account (political)⁵²</p>	<p>Odd name, borrowed photos, few friends, locked profile, vanity URL mismatch⁵³</p>

Figure 5: High likelihood inauthentic Cruz Facebook post sharer accounts

⁴⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wvr--_qQAZAEwq3VhZVvbS9RDUpgzfnP/view?usp=sharing

⁴⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aNe17EC0gPeT9_qXWg4Gqiawwwvr34UJ/view?usp=sharing

⁵⁰ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j0YIGCBvDylAcfhpSB0XUWc73PhI33pt/view?usp=sharing>

⁵¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w4dWsRB9FSMyD5EikD7JfgKR07B2m-0A/view?usp=sharing>

Note: Halies Grome account also detected in previous Democracy.Net.PH investigation: <https://democracy.net.ph/published/2025.07.03.RespectMyPostUseOfInformationOperations2025PhilippineMidtermElections.pdf>

⁵² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VbvdWteXtZj83LZA8-prn_Qz_X4u3gor/view?usp=sharing

⁵³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zXIPH-z7CLR5hc_LEopYIViFiFPIxdl6/view?usp=drive_link

While our investigation did not explore explicit coordination between actors in these incidents, we did find extensive evidence of inauthentic behavior. A notable percentage of commenters and sharers of Cruz's post disseminating a fabricated NED account were clearly inauthentic actors. For instance, a number of accounts examined seem to be "posting to the ether" by constantly sharing posts to virtually non-existent audiences. One of them has an account age of 18 years old, yet still has only a single friend, and shares posts and reels at rapid inhuman bot-like speeds.

The substantial amount of inauthentic accounts amplifying the observables lead us to believe that there is coordinated inauthentic behavior trying to manipulate public perception of the anti-corruption protests, reframing it from righteous anger against corrupt politicians and government officials, into US-funded protests against President Marcos Jr.

According to Filippo Menczer of Indiana University, the fraudulent commenting and sharing of posts can result in their amplification in feeds and social media algorithms.⁵⁴ These lead to an increase in visibility of the posts in user feeds, which can lead to organic uptake and traction among genuine users, as well as a bandwagon-feedback loop of escalating reach and virality.⁵⁵

We should also consider the authentic amplification of the fabricated NED memo. Given the reach of the influencers spreading the narrative regarding the alleged U.S. interference in the September 21 protest and the celebrity amplification by influential personalities, we classified this incident as a Category 5 on the Brookings Breakout Scale. Weaponizing and exploiting legitimate protests to advance partisan interests, whether in the domestic or geopolitical space, is manipulative and harmful to the public sphere. While the narrative on U.S. interference did not spill over to real world consequences, the legitimacy of voicing discontent must be protected.

Recommendations

[Democracy.Net.PH](#) recommends the establishment of policies and mechanisms to identify, prevent and penalize inauthentic, coordinated, and/or paid amplification instead of focusing only on the veracity of narratives. Doing so will ensure that interventions are rights-based, since it takes into consideration freedoms of expression, information, and of the press. Focusing on behavior, one of the foundations of the FIMI paradigm, also means that interventions will be actor-agnostic, since they will focus on what is being done instead of who is doing it.

⁵⁴ Filippo Menczer, "Facebook's algorithms fueled massive foreign propaganda campaigns during the 2020 election – here's how algorithms can manipulate you", The Conversation, September 20, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/facebooks-algorithms-fueled-massive-foreign-propaganda-campaigns-during-the-2020-election-heres-how-algorithms-can-manipulate-you-168229>

⁵⁵ Bjarke Mønsted, Piotr Sapieżyński, Emilio Ferrara, and Sune Lehmann, "Evidence of complex contagion of information in social media: An experiment using Twitter bots", PLoS ONE 12(9): e0184148, September 22, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0184148>

On the identification and detection side, we recommend the further development of frameworks for weighted metric scoring systems to determine levels of inauthenticity accounts and behaviors. We are looking towards engaging in additional research and collaboration with other investigators on this front.

[Democracy.Net.PH](#) also advocates for widespread Media Information Literacy (MIL), including the introduction of the concepts of Influence Operations and FIMI in addition to other information disorders such as disinformation. This is necessary to make the Filipino public self-aware of and more resilient against engineered manipulation being conducted on them.

We also recommend the identification, monitoring, and reporting on the behavior and actions of threat actors who do not hide their real-world identities. Moreover, we recommend the coordination and information sharing with other investigative and journalistic groups.

We have likewise been working with members of civil society, journalists, and policymakers such as lawmakers in order to advance these recommendations. We, along with like-minded groups, have been attending hearings and technical working groups at Congress in order to help craft effective legislation to address these issues. In this regard, better coordination between stakeholders and pressure on legislators must be pushed in order to pass laws that can hold bad actors performing CIB such as troll, account, engagement, and click farms to account. With the current lack of legislation, CIB runs rampant with entire local black market industries victimizing not just Filipinos, but also international communities as these perpetrators supply their illicit activities overseas.⁵⁶

This incident was considered a Category 5 in the Brookings Breakout Scale because of the participation of several well-known personalities in spreading the false narrative. However, as mentioned earlier, we recommend interventions that focus on behavior rather than content, such as amplification and CIB.

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) has fractured society's shared reality and stifled public expression. By targeting CIB and its systemic amplification, we can dismantle the manipulative networks that distort political perception. These interventions are vital steps toward restoring genuine discourse and rebuilding a common factual foundation.

⁵⁶ Shashank Bengali and Evan Halper, "Troll armies, a growth industry in the Philippines, may soon be coming to an election near you", Los Angeles Times, November 19, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-11-19/troll-armies-routine-in-philippine-politics-coming-here-next>

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