

A Report by Internews Harmful Speech Watch Researchers

META'S AMPLIFICATION OF PERSECUTION:

Red-Tagging in the Philippines

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction	5
Objectives	7
Methodology	7
II. Literature Review	9
A. Brief background of red-tagging in the Philippines	9
B. Red-tagging, threats, and incitement to violence by High Officials [of the Duterte Government]	11
I. Lorraine Badoy	11
II. Colonel Harold Cabunoc	13
III. Mocha Uson	13
III. Case Studies of Online to Offline Harm	15
A. Election-Related Red-Tagging	15
I. Vice President Leni Robredo	15
II. Makabayan Bloc	24
B. Red-tagging of Human Rights Defenders	32
Chad Bood	32
C. Red-tagging of Journalists and Media Organizations	34
Lady Ann “Icy” Salem	34
Altermidya	37
ABS-CBN	42

D. Red-tagging of Civil Society	46
Save Our Schools Network	46
University of the Philippines	47
E. Red-tagging and Violence Against Women Public Figures	49
Liza Soberano, Catriona Gray and Angel Locsin	50
Patreng Non	52
Sarah Elago	54
IV. Platform Failures and Recommendations	55

I. Introduction

In the last decade, the Philippines – leading the “most internet addicted region on the planet” – has consistently topped the world internet usage index with users spending an average of 10 hours a day of screen time.¹ The country’s dominance on such indexes is no surprise given the critical element, Meta’s now defunct “Free Facebook” initiative, that first catapulted the number of Filipino users online in 2013. As a way to grow its user base away from developed countries, Meta subsidized internet access to Facebook on mobile devices in a country where the government’s infrastructure spending was low, cellular data expensive, and many people used smartphones as their only access to the internet.² While the initiative failed in other countries, it proved markedly successful in the Philippines which now boasts over 92 million users and is of one of Meta’s largest markets.³ The company’s importance as a platform for news and political discourse in the country became evident in 2016 when it was dubbed the “Patient Zero for the war on disinformation” by Facebook’s Public Policy Director for Global Elections.^{4,5}

In 2022, which witnessed the resurrection of the Marcos family to political power, Facebook is no longer simply a battleground for disinformation but a tool wielded by state officials to “brand and hound any perceived enemies of the state” through red-tagging, which refers to the labeling and branding of individuals and organization as left-wing, subversives, communists, or terrorists.⁶ With the passage of the Duterte administration’s controversial Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (RA11479), state security forces are now empowered to arrest and detain suspected individuals without a warrant.⁷

While red-tagging existed long before President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office, his administration has expanded the practice into a government apparatus that has authorized the warrantless harassment, detainment, and killing of human rights

defenders, journalists, and educators. His 2017 decree - that officially designated the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) as terrorist organizations - meant that anyone accused of communist associations was branded a terrorist.⁸

Red-tagging is one of the many human rights crises that are likely to escalate following the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as president. While Marcos Jr. only assumed his term in office on June 30th, Meta's deference to his predecessor President Duterte and his administration serves as a harbinger for future limitations on civic space. Meta has long been aware of the issue of red-tagging; as early as 2020, human rights groups and news outlet Rappler – which is contracted by Meta as a fact-checker – have detailed to the company how the Duterte-Marcos alliance have not only used Facebook to red-tag groups and individuals critical of the government but also exploited the mechanics of the platform to amplify such content. Beyond an acknowledgment that Facebook was “associated with a range of salient human rights risks” in Meta's Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) of the Philippines, the company has done little to enforce its policies or develop adequate policies to address red-tagging.⁹

As the body of this report will make clear, red-tagging is a manifestly harmful practice, which can expose its targets to the risk of harassment, unwarranted arrest, and physical violence. The impacts of red-tagging on Filipino society are far wider, creating a culture of fear and accusation, and leading opposition voices to self-censor to avoid being targeted or even associated with potential targets. This intimidation and silencing of opposition are, of course, the point of red-tagging. By allowing the practice to continue largely unchecked online platform companies, including Meta, have significantly contributed to an enabling environment for violence, reinforced the lack of public accountability of government institutions, and ultimately led to the killing of red-tagged people.¹⁰

Red-tagging has largely managed to fall between the cracks of platform content policies, without being classified as harassment or hate speech. This policy gray area has markedly contributed to the success of the tactic, and there is significant anecdotal evidence that red-taggers are well aware of how best to avoid sanction by the platforms. The final section of this report explores how Meta specifically has failed to enforce existing policies that could curb red-tagging and outlines two small and concrete policy adjustments that will further address the issue.

Whilst social media companies are not responsible for the wider practice of red-tagging, it is well within their power to address the issue on their platforms and mitigate the manifest harms that it is bringing to Filipino society. Their failure to do so is negligent and must be rectified.

Objectives

This report aims to answer the question: How does Meta cause or contribute to offline harm as a result of online red-tagging?

The research and analysis outlined in the report aim to:

1. Highlight the prevalence of red-tagging on Facebook by state actors and anti-opposition netizens;
2. Demonstrate how the platform facilitates the offline reach of red-tagging using qualitative case studies; and,
3. Identify the kinds of offline harm that result from online red-tagging.

Methodology

Internews' *Harmful Speech Watch* project aims to monitor, contextualize, and analyze the on-the-ground implications of online harmful speech (i.e., hate speech, misinformation, harassment, coordinated inauthentic behavior, criminal activities, graphic content etc.). The team works in collaboration with local partners in each of the 10 countries it covers (Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Philippines, Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Thailand).

The project partners represent as wide a demographic, linguistic, and geographic area as possible, and provide local insight, expertise, and context to harmful content. Our partners include civil society activists, journalists, academics, humanitarian professionals, and legal experts.

The research for this report was conducted between April and May 2022 by Internews' researchers in the Philippines. The data used was gathered through a desk review, which surveyed existing resources, including news articles, social media posts, and human rights reports that provide information on documented cases of online red-tagging.

From this review, qualitative case studies were developed to provide an in-depth look into individual and collective cases of online red-tagging, and the resulting offline harms experienced by victims. To better illustrate the relationship between online content and offline harm, the pattern is represented by the following diagram.

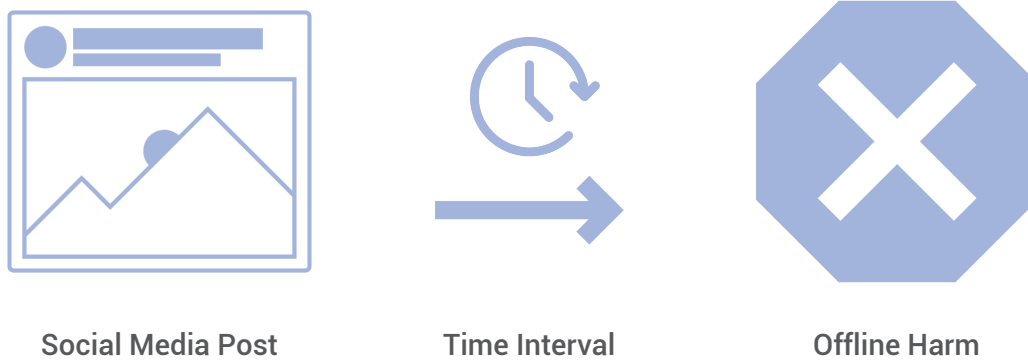


Figure 1. A general illustration of the relationship between online content and offline harm.

In each case, at least three elements are identified: 1) Social media content, which covers those posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and/or YouTube; 2) Time interval, which refers to the length of time between the date a certain content was posted and the date attributable offline harm occurred, and; 3) Offline harm, which includes but is not limited to illegal arrests, trumped-up legal charges, intimidation, death threats, and/or killings.

Researchers identified several groups considered most vulnerable and most adversely impacted by red-tagging, including:

- Human rights defenders/activists
- Journalists and media organizations
- Civil society

The case studies also provide thematic discussions on online red-tagging to provide insight on how red-tagging was weaponized during the 2022 National Elections, and how red-tagging is often intertwined with gender-based violence when used against women.

Due to the high usage of Facebook in the Philippines, especially amongst government officials and influencers supportive of Duterte and Marcos, as well as the company's long standing relationship with the state, case studies in this report are solely focused on Facebook. To substantiate select cases, and further demonstrate the impacts of online red-tagging on victims' mental health, and professional and personal lives, researchers also conducted interviews as part of their methodology.

II. Literature Review

A. Brief background of red-tagging in the Philippines

Red-tagging refers to an act whereby state actors, particularly law enforcement agencies, publicly brand individuals, groups, or institutions as communist terrorist groups, often without grounds.¹¹ This phenomenon has become prevalent in the Philippines by a state-initiated “red scare” or paranoia surrounding an internal “communist terrorist threat,” and is reminiscent of 1950s McCarthyism in the US. Amid the Cold War, Republican Senator Joe McCarthy encouraged fears among the public that communists were *everywhere* — they could be local school teachers, trade unionists, or journalists, and they would use their positions to “aid the program of world communist dominion.” This motivated McCarthy to launch a series of highly-publicized investigations of alleged communists, or “any man who has been named by either a senator or a committee or a congressman as dangerous to the welfare of [the] nation.”¹²

Similarly, the Philippines government began red-tagging as part of counterinsurgency efforts against the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in 1969. The CPP-NPA, the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), seeks to replace the current government with a leftist administration and to banish US influence from the country.^{13,14} Over the years, the CPP-NPA fought in guerilla wars against the Japanese and Americans and battled the government and Filipino elites through grenade attacks, ambushes, and armed confrontations.¹⁵ In 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF) was formed to operate as an “integral and

separate part” of the CPP-NPA. Its responsibility has been to contribute to the CPP-NPA's armed and organizational expansion.¹⁶

In 2017, President Rodrigo Duterte proclaimed an “all-out war” on communists, alleging that the lack of law and order had led to their increased presence, predominantly in rural areas¹⁷ Duterte and the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) officially labeled the CPP-NPA and the NDF terrorist organizations through resolutions passed in 2020 and 2021.^{18,19}

Under the Duterte administration, red-tagging intensified and became institutionalized through the creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. The NTF-ELCAC acts as the primary mechanism through which the government labels leftist actors and government critics as communist terrorists,²⁰ while the Anti-Terrorism Act legalizes warrantless surveillance, arrest, and detention without judicial proceedings.²¹ Together, they form an apparatus intended to support the Filipino government's aim to “eliminate communist rebellion” by mid-2022.²²

It is well documented that the practice of red-tagging by the Duterte administration targets many leftist civic actors such as human rights defenders, public interest lawyers, journalists, activists, and political opponents as they are blacklisted and labeled as terrorists.^{23,24} According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the focus of this administration's red-tagging is to “discredit the messengers rather than examining the substance of the message.”²⁵

In March 2021, President Duterte ordered the military and police to “forget about human rights” and to “kill and finish off” all communist rebels. Since then, state forces and unidentified assailants have been reported to engage in the extra-judicial killing (EJK) and torture of these targets.¹¹ The declaration has ushered in a new wave of bloodshed similar to Duterte's deadly War on Drugs. For some, being red-tagged is tantamount to a death sentence regardless of their true beliefs and affiliations.²⁶

From July 2016 to June 2021, human rights organization Karapatan recorded 421 victims of EJKs, 2,758 victims of warrantless arrest without detention, and 1,138 victims of warrantless arrest with detention as a result of red-tagging.²⁷ In March 2021, nine activists and human rights defenders including secretary-general of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) - Cavite and known mass organizer in the Southern Tagalog region Emmanuel “Manny” Asuncion and members of the progressive group Ugnayan ng Mamamayan Laban sa Pagwawasak ng

Kalikasan at Kalupaan (UMALPAS KA) Chai Lemita-Evangelista and Ariel Evangelista were killed by state forces after repeatedly being red-tagged in what has become known as the “Bloody Sunday Massacres.”²⁸

Red-tagging has become a key issue of human rights abuse in the Philippines as activism and dissent are equated to communist rebellion, and incitement to violence against those that are red-tagged is rampant online and offline.^{29,30} Nonetheless, the 2022 National Elections demonstrate that red-tagging is no longer simply a human rights abuse but a symptom of a democratic crisis; the most powerful arguments against presidential candidate Leni Robredo were false accusations of communist terrorist affiliation.

The majority of these accusations against her and all listed victims of red-tagging first appeared on Facebook. The social media platform promotes, amplifies, and enables the reckless practice by government officials to name and tag both opposition and involuntary public figures, most of which are human rights activists, educators, and lawyers. The United Nations officially condemned red-tagging and violence against Filipino human rights defenders.³¹ In January 2022, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) held social media companies — particularly Meta — accountable and urged them to counter red-tagging on their platforms.³²

B. Red-tagging, threats and incitement to violence by High Officials [of the Duterte Government]

I. Lorraine Badoy

Lorraine Badoy is the Undersecretary of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) and Spokesperson of the NTF-ELCAC. In 2017, she was appointed to her role in the PCOO by Duterte and has been a leading supporter of the president.³³ In response to the European Union's criticism of the administration's War on Drugs, Badoy sarcastically advised on her Facebook page that they stop meddling and “stick to child porn” as that is what they are “good at” (*‘Iyong mga taga-EU, mag-online child porn muna kayo. D’yan naman kayo magaling eh!’*).³⁴

Badoy is known to be a serial red-tagger on Facebook as she faces at least 11 legal complaints from journalists, politicians, human rights groups, and others. Maria Ressa — a journalist, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Co-Founder and CEO of Rappler — filed a 29-page complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman about being red-tagged by Badoy as a “mouthpiece of the enemies of the state” (referring to the CPP-NPA) and being called a “sociopath” and “master bullshitter.” Ressa said Badoy has caused a “real threat to [her] life, security, and liberty.”³⁵

During the 2022 election campaign, Badoy actively red-tagged opposition politicians such as Leni Robredo despite supporting her vice presidency in 2016 through the “Women for Leni” campaign.³⁶ Ahead of this year’s election, Badoy falsely claimed Robredo was endorsed by CPP founder Jose Maria “Joma” Sison and that she ultimately “formed a tactical alliance with [these] communist terrorists.”³⁷ Following this, several groups and individual supporters called for Badoy’s immediate suspension from office due to her “unbridled abuse” during campaign season, citing her breach of the Code of Conduct, Omnibus Election Code, Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, and other laws.³⁸ Badoy also faced a complaint for red-tagging Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong in social media posts after he ordered the police to take down tarpaulins that express red-tagging sentiments towards activists, students, and other personalities in his city.³⁹

In April 2022, Badoy faced a stream of complaints for red-tagging volunteers and organizations, particularly Ana Patricia “Patreng” Non who created the Maginhawa Community Pantry aimed at feeding Filipinos affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. Badoy expressed on Facebook that this initiative was the “modus operandi” of communist terrorist groups. Non’s mother reported that this statement caused her daughter “mental and psychological torture.”⁴⁰ Bonafide organizations such as the Alliance of Health Workers and the IBON Foundation have also been arbitrarily red-tagged as communist terrorist affiliates.⁴¹

Badoy’s [Facebook page](#) has been suspended twice; however, this has not deterred Badoy from red-tagging as her page is active again. It has 145,000+ followers and hundreds of reactions, comments, and shares of red-tagging posts. Badoy also expresses her red-tagging sentiments via the NTF-ELCAC page with other executives.⁴² These include:

II. Colonel Harold Cabunoc

Col. Harold Cabunoc is Chief of the Operations Research Center (ORC) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Cabunoc officially took over as ORC chief in January 2020. With [994K followers to date](#), he is regarded as the military's most savvy user of social media. Cabunoc has red-tagged journalists, human rights defenders, and party-list organizations. In his [post](#) from June 27, 2020, Cabunoc accused INQUIRER.net reporter Gabriel Pabico Lalu of writing "fake news," even calling him an NPA "propagandist," and urged Lalu to correct his news article to present the government's side. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) called out Cabunoc, reiterating that his habit to red-tag journalists and other human rights defenders is unfortunately not isolated, and that other state security forces have been tagging media organizations and journalists as legal fronts or sympathizers of the CPP-NPA-NDF.⁴³ Internews has [documented](#) Cabunoc's content that also red-tagged legitimate human rights organizations, as well as the [slain activist Chad Booc](#). As an active and high-ranking official in the military, Cabunoc's statements are far-reaching and consequential, especially among active military members who have a history of EJKs.

Facebook does not have Community Standards that address content by active military personnel except in Myanmar, where it banned the Tatmadaw from the platform in 2020. When the company announced the decision, they cited the military's history of human rights abuses and record of spreading misinformation.⁴⁴ Human rights organizations in the Philippines have repeatedly reported the Philippines Army's similar track record – especially in recent years when unlawful killings by the military and police have been well documented – but Meta has not acted beyond acknowledging that such cases do appear on Facebook.⁴⁵

III. Mocha Uson

Former Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) ASec. [Mocha Uson](#) is among government officials who actively use Facebook to red-tag opponents. With 5.6 million followers on Facebook, she was one of many former influencers approached by President Duterte in 2016 to join his cabinet. Both her Twitter and Facebook accounts were briefly suspended for propagating hate speech and abusive behavior.⁴⁶

In 2018, she linked an organization advocating for indigenous people's (IP) rights to the communist rebels, while in 2019, she red-tagged a forum organized by the Kabataan party-list and called it "an event for terrorists."⁴⁷ Kabataan party-list, originally Ang Nagkakaisang Kabataan para sa Sambayanan, is part of the Makabayan bloc, a coalition of party-lists in the Philippines' House of Representatives.⁴⁸ In February 2020, she initiated a red-tagging spree of young activists, who were part of the "Tacloban Five" and accused them of possessing firearms, explosives, and ammunition.⁴⁹ Her post was captioned with the infamous phrase, "Study now, NPA (New People's Army) later."

Uson demonstrates the strategic decision by the Duterte administration to employ highly followed influencers within the Philippine government. At the time of her hiring, Facebook's policies still mostly shielded government officials and politicians from the content moderation rules that apply to regular users. Emboldened by such an exception, Uson and other government officials such as Lorraine Badoy could continue to red-tag organizations and individuals and spread hate speech without fear of any consequences by the platform. The 2021 Oversight Board decision on former President Trump forced Facebook to update its rules concerning politicians but posts made directly by them are still not subject to independent review by fact-checkers. In the Philippines, Facebook's main fact-checkers are also some of the greatest targets of red-tagging by the Duterte/Marcos alliance: Rappler and Vera Files. While the new policies subject politicians to other content moderation rules, such as bullying, very few instances of red-tagging have been deemed to fall under that standard.⁵⁰

III. Case Studies of Online to Offline Harm

A. Election-Related Red-Tagging

I. Vice President Leni Robredo

Former lawyer and district representative Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo is an opposition politician known for her criticism of President Duterte’s War on Drugs and the human rights atrocities that occurred during his administration. She ran against Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. for vice president in 2016, winning by a slim margin. Following his defeat, Marcos Jr. made multiple legal attempts to overturn the 2016 election results, which have all been struck down by the Supreme Court for lack of evidence.⁵¹

As early as 2020, the 2022 National Elections were defined by high-level and coordinated red-tagging of Robredo in an attempt to discredit the opposition.⁵² Internews researchers consistently reported Robredo as a primary target since her campaign for the presidency began to gain support in 2021. While 2022 saw increased use of other social media platforms⁵³ to red-tag the opposition, Facebook remained the primary battleground for state actors, news platforms, and private citizens to red-tag Robredo and her supporters. Multiple reports have noted that most online harassment directed at Robredo, and her campaign, include vitriolic “hate-filled messages.”

Robredo is among a long list of high-profile female politicians around the world who have experienced toxic behavior on Facebook.⁵⁴ Internews’ researchers consistently note the high volume of sexualized and degrading content that targets Robredo based on her appearance and gender. In October 2021, the company announced updates to their community standards to address such content globally but much of the content

reported by Internews remains on the platform.⁵⁵ Red-tagging content against Robredo still contained sexualized insinuations and gendered tones.

The Liberal Party condemned the red-tagging of Robredo and her campaign, noting it “enables violence” and “endangers even the lives of democratically-elected representatives, and the vice president herself.”⁵⁶ The following online content must be noted:

NTF-ELCAC and Badoy red-tag Robredo as a communist sympathizer and affiliate (December 6, 2021 & March 23, 2022)



Picture 1. Screenshot of NTF-ELCAC representatives tagging Presidential Candidate Leni Robredo. Translation: "Moreno, Robredo, and Pacquiao support the calls of the CPP"

Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI) is a news channel owned by Pastor Apollo Quibolloy, an open Duterte supporter who also endorsed Marcos Jr.'s candidacy in the 2022 National Elections. As such, SMNI News functions as a pro-administration outlet as evidenced by its coordination with the NTF-ELCAC in broadcasting news and official government statements regarding the red-tagging of opposition actors. “[Laban Kasama Ang Bayan](#)” is a clear example of this high-level coordination — it is a program presented by SMNI news featuring the NTF-ELCAC's Lorraine Badoy as a host who focuses on discussions about the “communist insurgency” in the Philippines as well as red-tagging “suspect” figures.

In a [post](#) from December, SMNI News hosted a Facebook Live featuring executives of the NTF-ELCAC in which Robredo and other presidential candidates were branded communist sympathizers because they believed Sara Duterte and Marcos Jr. should be disqualified from the 2022 National Elections. Such a stance, according to the NTF-ELCAC, amounts to communist rhetoric.

The NTF-ELCAC's Facebook page has been extremely active in releasing red-tagging content against Robredo during the campaign period, all of which are not backed by evidence. In March, the page posted a lengthy statement by Badoy red-tagging Robredo as a communist terrorist after the Makabayan Bloc, accused of being a “legal front” for the CPP-NPA-NDF, endorsed her candidacy.

Pro-Duterte pastor, Apollo Quiboloy, tags Robredo as communist supporter

Pastor Apollo Quiboloy urged the public not to vote for Robredo through SMNI's Facebook page. He echoed the arguments used by Badoy, and other NTF-ELCAC executives, to justify accusations that Robredo is a supporter of the CPP-NPA-NDF. He likewise equated Robredo's call to redirect funding from the NTF-ELCAC to low-income households placed under quarantine as a sign of her communist sympathies. No credible evidence has been produced to substantiate such claims.



Picture 2. Screenshot of Pastor Apollo Quiboloy tagging Presidential Candidate Leni Robredo as a communist sympathizer. Translation: "Do not vote for Robredo"

Salvador Panelo urges Robredo to cut ties with communist terrorists

In a post shared by NTF-ELCAC, Salvador Panelo — senatorial candidate and former chief legal counsel to the Duterte administration — accused Robredo of collaborating with the CPP-NPA-NDF and "sleeping with the enemy" of the state. He claimed that communist terrorist organizations deliberately attend Robredo's campaign rallies to exaggerate attendance numbers. Such claims are similarly not substantiated with credible evidence.



Picture 3: Screenshot of NTF-ELCAC's Facebook post that claims former chief presidential legal counsel and now senatorial aspirant Salvador Panelo advised presidential candidate Leni Robredo "to end her links with left-leaning groups."

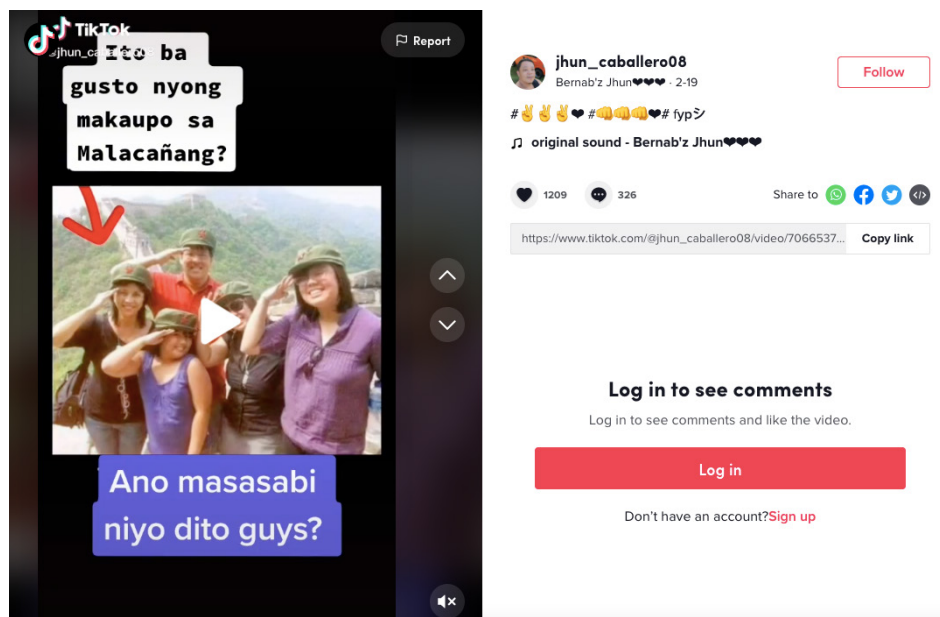
Netizens echo red-tagging sentiments

A mass of BBM and Duterte supporters have echoed accusations of red-tagging through memes and spliced videos. For instance, "Viral News" — a Facebook page with 5,527 followers and 1,330 likers — posted a misleading video that showed the wife of Kiko Pangilinan, Robredo's running mate, confirming rumors that Robredo has allied with the CPP-NPA-NDF. A [video](#), which has since gone viral, featured a picture of Robredo and her family on vacation in China, seemingly to brand them as communists. It also featured interviews with Badoy and Duterte which linked her to the CPP-NPA-NDF.



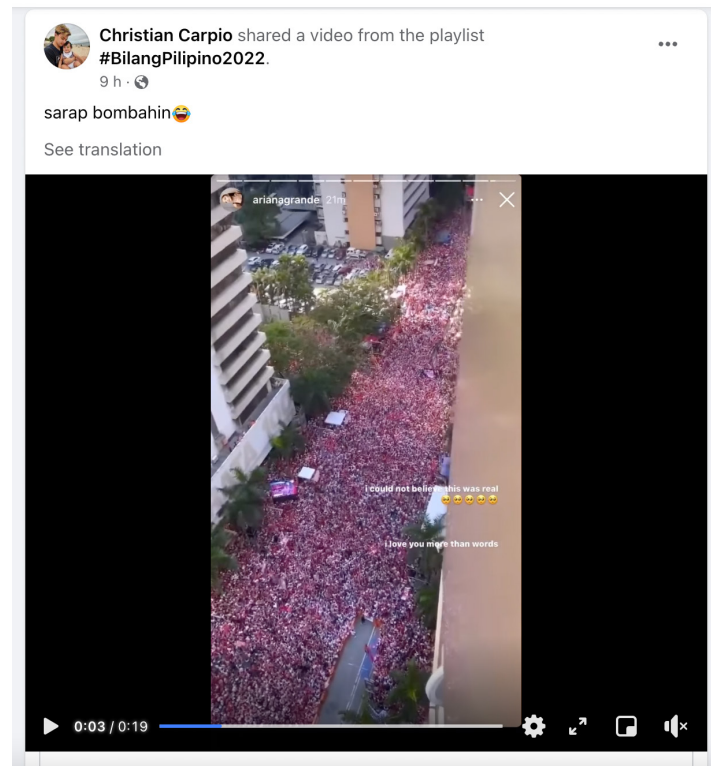
Picture 4. Screenshot of a popular Facebook page tagging Robredo. Translation: "From Sharon Cuneta herself. Smells like a CPP-NPA-NDF COALITION"

While Robredo is the main target of red-tagging, supporters and volunteers of her campaign tend to be more directly impacted. The following incidents of offline harm are among the most prominent results of online red-tagging:



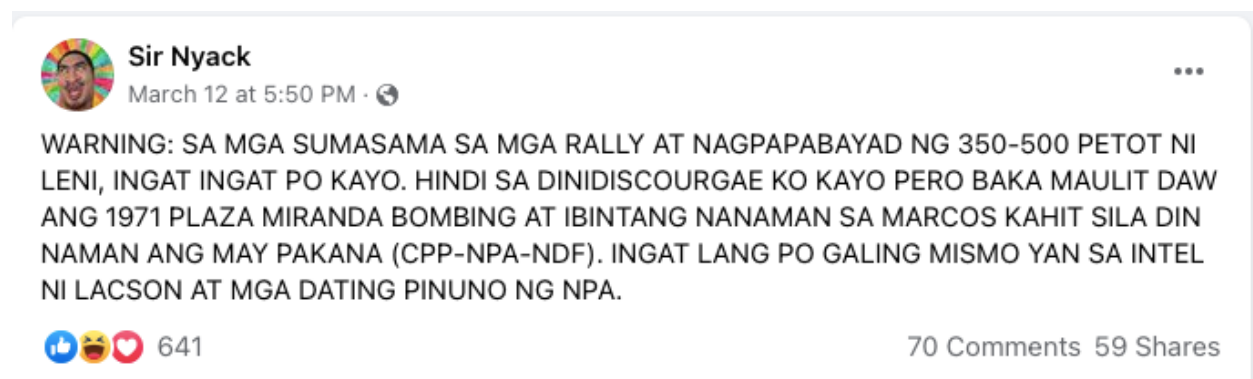
Picture 5. Screenshot of a video featuring Robredo and her family on a vacation in China to brand them as communist terrorists.

Bomb threats



Picture 6. Screenshot of a fake bomb attack threat on Facebook targeting a pro-Robredo rally.

Following the success of Leni-Kiko campaign rallies, [bomb jokes](#) and threats emerged on Facebook as pro-BBM netizens expressed the desire or intention to bomb upcoming Robredo rallies.



Picture 7. Screenshot of a Facebook post by a pro-BBM supporter referencing the Plaza Miranda Bombing to suggest that pro-Robredo rallies are likely to be targeted with a bomb attack.

In the above image, a BBM supporter references the 1971 Plaza Miranda Bombing, when two grenades were detonated during the Liberal Party's (LP) announcement of its senatorial and local candidates in Manila, killing nine and wounding 95 including Senate President Jovito Salonga, LP President Gerardo Roxas, Senators Eddie Ilarde and Eva Estrada Kalaw, and other opposition politicians.⁵⁷

The user warned of a repeat of the Plaza Miranda Bombing during Robredo's campaign rallies, implying that the rallies risked being targeted. It likewise echoed narratives spread by former dictator President Ferdinand Marcos that the bombing was masterminded by CPP founder Joma Sison with the intent to frame Marcos; thus cementing further red-tagging sentiments against Robredo. That narrative has never been verified and many historians continue to suspect Marcos planned the bombing as an excuse for Martial Law.⁵⁸

Internews has assessed this content and found that it violates Facebook's Community Standards on [Dangerous Individuals and Organizations \(Tier 3\)](#) regarding Violence-Inducing Conspiracy Networks (VICNs). The policy prohibits non-state actors that "promote theories that attribute violent or dehumanizing behavior to people or organizations that have been debunked by credible sources."⁵⁹ Meta has failed to enforce their own standards as the post in question has not been fact-checked nor removed from the platform.

Red-tagging streamers

Robredo's campaign visit to Leyte was greeted by posters and placards proclaiming her alleged affiliation with the CPP-NPA-NDF. These were quickly taken down as Robredo's party debunked the claims and stated that such misinformation was likely to spark violence and endanger the life of the VP.⁶⁰

Physical harassment of volunteers

Cavite's 7th District representative, Jesus Crispin "Boying" Catibayan Remulla, and presidential candidate Sen. Ping Lacson took to Facebook and Twitter to red-tag volunteers of Robredo's campaign as affiliates of the CPP-NPA-NDF. Shortly after, at least 12 members of Anakpawis — a heavily red-tagged organization and party-list — were raided and detained by the police without a warrant while campaigning for Leni-Kiko. Two were reported to be arrested.⁶¹

Team Leni Robredo (TLR), the volunteer arm of Robredo's campaign, also reported the physical harassment of their volunteers in February 2022 as they cited an incident of their volunteers being chased with a knife by two men as they chanted "We're still for BBM! We're still for BBM! (*"BBM pa rin! BBM pa rin!"*). TLR condemned the attack and urged the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to "take immediate action to protect [their] democratic values and electoral processes."⁶²

In another account of physical harassment, 800 members of the Ilocos Norte for Leni-Kiko Volunteers were yelled at and called offensive names like "*bobo* (stupid)," "*lutang*" (dumb)," "*bayaran* (hired/fake volunteers)," and were ultimately told that they were "not real Ilocanos" ("*Haan nga pudno nga Ilocano*") as they were marching into Laoag City: Marcos' hometown.⁶³

Online harassment and profiling of Robredo's supporters and volunteers

Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte's landslide victory in the 2022 National Elections immediately prompted widespread protest across the country by Robredo's supporters, students, and youth organizations. They took to the streets and to Comelec's headquarters to denounce another Marcos-Duterte premiership and alleged electoral fraud. This was encouraged by a mass "academic walkout" initiated by student councils at several Philippines universities, including the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, and University of Santo Tomas.⁶⁴

Although the protests were peaceful, many social media users took to Facebook to red-tag participants as members of the CPP-NPA-NDF and spread fears about the "communist initiative" ("*galawang komunista*"). On May 11, 2022, the NTF-ELCAC released a [lengthy statement](#) entitled "Hands Off Our Children!" Its emotional rhetoric is aimed at sowing mistrust of rallies and political mobilization, suggesting that it inevitably leads to the youth being recruited to communist terrorist organizations. Pro-Marcos users [echoed](#) these sentiments as they vowed to keep their children from joining the protests and consorting with alleged communist terrorists; one even pointed out the sea of red flags the youth was carrying as evidence supporting the claim even though the flags were merely meant to represent the colors of the organizations present (e.g. Anakbayan). INQUIRER.net — a popular news platform with 7.9 million followers on Facebook — [labeled](#) the unarmed protesters as "militant groups."

This has manifested into intensified online red-tagging and harassment of Robredo's supporters on Facebook as Internews researchers report that some have locked their profiles, transferred to "safer" social media platforms, and/or deleted their accounts altogether. Researchers have observed that Robredo supporters are often bullied via Facebook messenger and negatively profiled by the police. In response, the University of the Philippines released a [statement](#) condemning NTF-ELCAC red-tagging in the wake of the 2022 National Elections, declaring that they would "not stand down when students' lives are at risk."⁶⁵

II. Makabayan Bloc

The Makabayan Bloc (or the *Makabayang Koalisyon ng Mamamayan*) is a coalition of 13 progressive and left-wing party-lists founded in 2009. Among these party-lists are the political parties Kabataan, Anakpawis, Bayan Muna, Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), and Gabriela, all of whom campaigned for seats in the House of Representatives. During the campaign period, the Makabayan Bloc faced the same red-tagging campaign as Robredo, accused of being affiliates of the CPP-NPA-NDF.

During his candidacy in 2016, Duterte declared himself a leftist and spoke of implementing progressive policies such as continuing peace talks with communists and releasing political prisoners. His populist, anti-elitist stance prompted the Makabayan Bloc to join Duterte in the majority. However, one year into Duterte's administration, congress members of the Bloc began to criticize Duterte's narcotics policies and his failure to secure an agreement with communist insurgents during peace talks. The coalition said they "were tricked by Duterte" whose administration has "fully unraveled as a fascist, pro-imperialist, and anti-people regime."⁶⁶ Since members of the Bloc have protested in favor of better government policies, an approach condemned by Badoy and Duterte.⁶⁷

In June 2021, Badoy told The Philippine Star that she and the NTF-ELCAC are "using all legal means" to remove six elected lawmakers of the Makabayan Bloc from their positions in the House of Representatives. They claimed the representatives "abused their powers and resources of the government to destroy the government and enable the most heinous crimes"⁶⁸ The NTF-ELCAC later filed for the Bloc's disqualification from the 2022 elections⁶⁹ after their initial efforts were not successful. Duterte echoed Badoy's sentiments in a March 2022 speech to once again claim the Bloc – specifically, Kabataan, Anakpawis, Bayan Muna, ACT, and Gabriela – were "legal

fronts” of the CPP-NPA-NDF. He explained he could “see it in their behavior and the way they espouse their advocacy for the left”. He then appealed to the public to refrain from voting for these party-lists.⁷⁰

Offline red-tagging of these state actors have been used by NTF-ELCAC and PCOO Facebook pages in emotionally-charged videos, quote cards, and articles authored by the Philippine News Agency (PNA), a government-owned news website. The NTF-ELCAC and PCOO’s posts typically garner hundreds to thousands of likes, shares, and comments by Duterte supporters. The following online content must be noted:

NTF-ELCAC tags elected lawmaker as rebel recruiter



Picture 8. Screenshot of a post by NTF-ELCAC claiming that Eufemia Cullamat recruits indigenous people into the NPA.

NTF-ELCAC Vice-Chairperson and National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon angrily claimed that the leftist Bayan Muna representative Eufemia Cullamat continued to recruit indigenous people to the NPA even after her daughter, Jevilyn Cullamat, was killed in clashes

with the Philippines Army in Surigao del Sur in November 2020.⁷¹ The army and representative Cullamat herself confirmed that Jevilyn was a member of the NPA in which she served as a medic. However, Rep. Cullamat maintains that her party-list and the Makabayan Bloc are not involved with the NPA. Cullamat condemned the Philippine Army's "desecration" of her daughter's remains as they released a [photo](#) showing her daughter's body along with confiscated firearms and other paraphernalia at the clash site. Cullamat urged the Army not to use Jevilyn's body as a "trophy" and to refrain from insulting her family while they were grieving.⁷² Researchers were unable to find any evidence that supports Esperon's claim.

NTF-ELCAC "witness" accuses Makabayan Bloc representatives of planning to overthrow the government



Picture 9. Screenshot of a video featuring a NTF-ELCAC "witness" tagging the Makabayan Bloc.

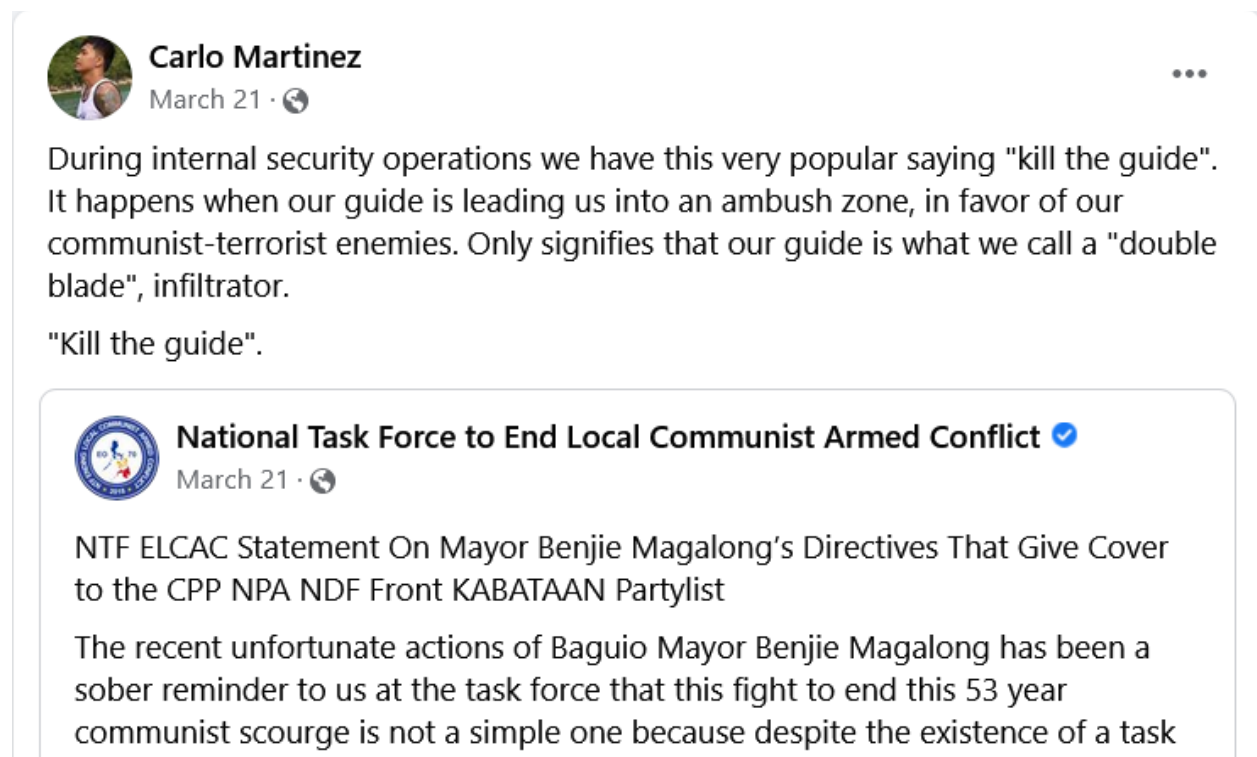
NTF-ELCAC "witness" "Ka Eric" Almendras called duly elected party-list representatives communists and terrorists. In the above video clip, he told SMNI News that the lawmakers' opposition to the Barangay Development Program (BDP) was intended to topple the government.

The BDP is a joint program of the NTF-ELCAC and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) which seeks to provide incentives to barangays (local communities) supposedly cleared of communist terrorist affiliation. The BDP aims to target 822 barangays selected by the NTF-ELCAC, and is heavily funded by the government.⁷³ Makabayan Bloc party-list representatives

flagged the plan to fund the program during the government budget deliberations last year, citing that the fund may be prone to "misuse and abuse."⁷⁴

Not only does the post fail to provide evidence, but posts like this also encourage dangerous assumptions that lawmakers who are exercising their democratic right to question government policies aim to topple the government.

Post suggests the killing of a local politician after being red-tagged by NTF-ELCAC



Picture 10. Screenshot of a post by an affiliate of the PNP stating that Baguio City Mayor should be killed.

Carlo Martinez, a member of the Philippines National Police (PNP), shared an NTF-ELCAC post accusing Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong of betrayal and deceit after meeting with the left-wing Kabataan party-list and ordering local police to remove defamatory posters and banners labeling local activists as supporters of the NPA. In a post, Martinez explicitly stated that Magalong was a "double-agent," sided with the enemy, and should be killed. To date, Facebook has taken no action on the post.

NTF-ELCAC red-tags Makabayan Bloc as “legal fronts” of the CPP-NPA

National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict ✓
April 20 · 🌐

PANOORIN | Sinabi ni Pangulong Rodrigo R. Duterte na totoong 'legal fronts' ng CPP-NPA ang KABAG partylist.
(Kabataan, Anakpawis, Bayan Muna, Act Teachers, and Gabriela)

#NTFELCAC
#EO70

DUMPER PTDA	78 BUKLOD FILIPINO	124 OK PA
MALABUNG	79 BTS	125 A TEA
3H (BAGONG NERASYON)	80 MOCHA	126 PASA
AKMA-PTM	81 ACT TEACHERS	127 OFW I
PATUPAD	82 ALONA	128 ANGK
PINUNO	83 KABALIKAT	129 COCC
PGMA	Alliance of Concerned Teachers - ACT	130 ACT A

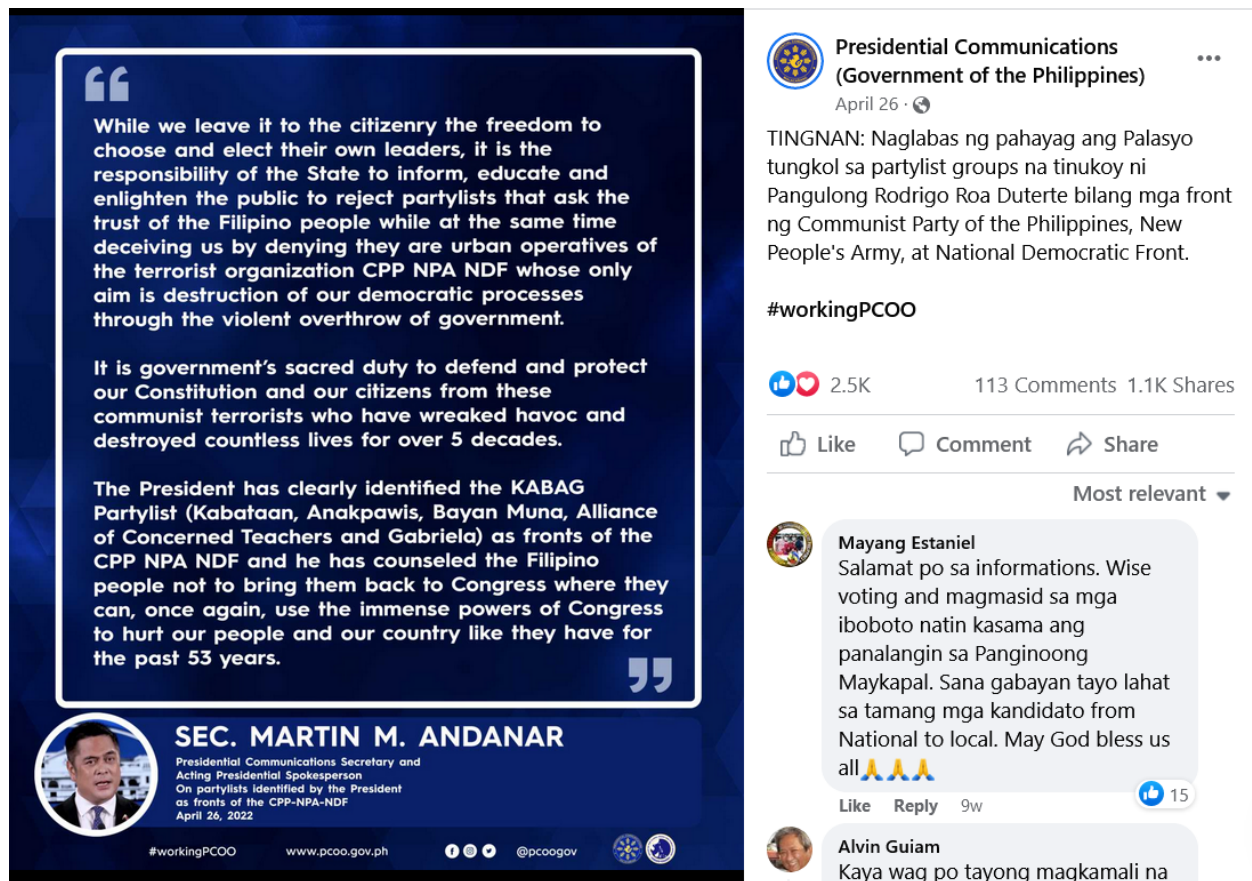
👍❤️ 9.7K 512 Comments 10K Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Picture 11. Screenshot of a post by the NTF-ELCAC tagging the Makabayan Bloc as legal fronts of the CPP-NPA.

This pinned post on the NTF-ELCAC's Facebook page features an emotionally-charged video of Duterte red-tagging party lists, which he abbreviates to “KABAG” (a derogatory Tagalog term for “stomach discomfort/pains”), as legal fronts of the CPP-NPA and urges the public not to vote for them. The video shows party-list members giving speeches at rallies and screenshots of reports on CPP-NPA killings in an attempt to link the party lists to the CPP-NPA-NDF.

Makabayan Bloc further red-tagged by PCOO, public urged not to vote for them



Picture 12. Screenshot of a post by the PCOO tagging the Makabayan Bloc.

In a post on Facebook, secretary and spokesperson Martin M. Andanar of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) referred to Duterte's "[Talk to the People](#)" speech. Andanar mirrored the president's red-tagging and urged the public not to re-elect the party lists Kabataan, Anakpawis, Bayan Muna, Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), and Gabriela who allegedly "use the immense powers of Congress to hurt [our] people and [our country] like they have for the past 53 years."

Reactions to red-tagging posts have generally been positive, with netizens confirming in comments that they would not re-elect the Makabayan Bloc into Congress and echoing condemnation of the coalition's representatives. Supporters shared these posts using the hashtag "#KamatayanBloc." Perhaps as a result of this systematic campaign, the Makabayan

Bloc lost half its seats in the House of Representatives. Those seats were held by Kabataan, ACT, and Gabriela- the first time since 2001 that Bayan Muna failed to secure a seat in Congress.⁷⁵ In response, the NTF-ELCAC issued a statement on its [Facebook page](#) celebrating their loss as it “will also be known as that chapter in [the] country’s history where empowered people successfully booted out half of the CPP-NPA-NDF in Congress signaling the start of the end of their 53-year reign of terror.”

Indeed, the unfounded red-tagging content that state actors have notoriously published on their respective Facebook pages has fed into physical and psychological harm towards members of progressive party lists; they have either been or are currently subject to harassment, surveillance, illegal arrests and detainment, and murder. Some crucial cases are as follows:

Rosanilla “Lai” Consad, Assistant High School Principal

Teachers have become a frequent target of red-tagging by both the NTF-ELCAC and the Department of Education. One such case is Lai Consad, the assistant principal of a high school in Butuan City and secretary-general of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) in Caraga. ACT, which aims to improve the “economic and political well-being” of teachers, [posted](#) on its Facebook page in 2019 to announce that Consad had been visited by intelligence agents at her school. The officials notified her that she and her husband were on a “hit list” due to her activism. Consad was then put under surveillance and followed by the police.

Only a few days after the Bloody Sunday Massacres, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) released a [memorandum](#) officially labeling ACT as a “known Communist Terrorist Group (CTG) front organization” that infiltrated government and schools. Consad was then arrested on trumped-up charges of attempted homicide due to her alleged participation in an NPA attack in Agusan Del Norte in 2020.⁷⁶ The Philippine National Police - Caraga region, a local police station, released a [statement](#) on Facebook justifying Consad’s arrest claiming she was an active member of the Urban Party Committee of the CPP-NPA-NDF Northeastern Committee and recruiting students into the organization. They cited an unknown intelligence report. Consad’s case was dismissed by court months later due to lack of evidence.⁷⁷

After her arrest, Consad told Rappler that her experience of red-tagging and harassment caused her to decline a job offer for a front-facing position in education because she felt she was in “imminent danger.” She added she also frequently changes her residence due to the looming threat that the police will kill her and her family.^{78,79}

In 2021, ACT reported that officials in the Department of Education had instructed their staff to disseminate an online survey intended to profile teachers who are members of ACT or the Teachers' Dignity Coalition "for no specified reason."⁸⁰ ACT also claimed the department did not protect its employees from the constant state-initiated red-tagging by the NTF-ELCAC on Facebook.

Larry Villegas, Bayan Muna - General Santos Coordinator

Larry Villegas is a prominent community organizer in his city, General Santos. Apart from being a coordinator of the left-wing and progressive party-list Bayan Muna, he is also the chairperson of a progressive transport organization and party-list "TIRES-PISTON" or the "Transport Integrated for Restructuring of Economic Services of Tires - Pinagkaisang Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Operators Nationwide." In addition, Villegas is known to be a vocal critic of the administration as he has spoken out against Duterte's anti-people policies including oil price hikes.^{81,82}

Villegas has been subject to red-tagging and [death threats](#) as he leads two groups that are designated CPP-NPA-NDF front organizations by the NTF-ELCAC. PISTON is specifically categorized as an "open-sectoral organization" allegedly led by the CPP for recruitment, according to a [series of infographics](#) posted on the NTF-ELCAC Facebook page. As a result of constant red-tagging, Villegas was shot in his home by an unidentified assailant on March 13 as he was leading support for a Leni-Kiko campaign rally.

Although Villegas survived the incident, House Deputy Minority leader and Bayan Muna representative Carlos Zarate was quick to [condemn](#) the attack, noting it had happened a few days after members of Anakpawis — a fellow party-list of the Makabayan Bloc — were raided and arrested without charge. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines expressed "[deep concern](#)" and launched an investigation into the incident.

Powerful government institutions with a large following on Facebook, like the NTF-ELCAC, are still able to post politically-motivated hate speech, disinformation, and red-tagging content, while activists and opposition figures continue to be targeted offline. Filipinos have taken to the street to condemn Facebook's alleged inaction against red-tagging, and stated that tighter protection needs to be implemented and government institutions should be held accountable.⁸³

B. Red-tagging of Human Rights Defenders

Chad Booc

Chad Booc started volunteering as a Mathematics teacher for the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development, Inc. (ALCADEV), an alternative school for indigenous people in Surigao del Sur in 2016, after graduating from the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. With thousands of followers, his [tweets](#) and [Facebook posts](#) became a source of news on remote indigenous communities. On February 24, 2022, he died in what the military reported was an encounter between army soldiers and the New People's Army (NPA); the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) claimed that Booc was a member of the NPA. Civil society groups have condemned Booc's killing,⁸⁴ noting that Booc was not an armed combatant or a member of the NPA. The [SOS-Network](#), a network of Lumad⁸⁵ schools of which Booc was a member, disputed AFP's claims and said that they sent Booc and his colleagues to conduct an initial assessment and environmental scanning of areas where Lumad schools once operated to prepare for reopening. Booc and his colleagues were on their way back to Davao City when the group were attacked.⁸⁶

Before Booc's death, he and ALCADEV were repeatedly red-tagged online:

- **July 21, 2020** : Booc posted on [Facebook](#) photos of posters that appear to be published by an Anti Communist Terrorist Vigilante (ACTIV) group in which he and other educators were red-tagged. Since the poster came from a vigilante group known to be violent, he believed it was tantamount to a death threat.
- **15 February 2021** : Almost a year before Booc's killing, Booc and his fellow teacher Roshelle Porcadilla, lumad elders Benito Bay-ao and Segundo Melong; and students Jomar Benag, Moddie Monsimuy-at, and Esmelito Oribawan were arrested on suspicion that they were recruiting Lumad minors and training them as "child warriors" of the CPP-NPA-NDF. After three months of detainment, the courts dismissed the case against them in May 2021 for lack of jurisdiction, insufficiency of evidence, and lack of probable cause.⁸⁷

- **20 February 2021** : The NTF-ELCAC published a lengthy Facebook post that red-tagged Booc, an alumnus of the UP College of Engineering (CoE). Among the post's long list of claims was the allegation that "Booc has consistently been an underground recruiter and operator for the CPP-NPA-NDF even during his student days in UP Diliman, where he was part of the CPP Party Branch unit in CoE." The claim was false and fact-checked by VERA Files.⁸⁸ The CoE issued a statement belying the allegations and challenging the accusers to substantiate their claim.⁸⁹
- **22 February 2021** : "[Pinoy Expose](#)," a Facebook page that has more than 41,000 followers claiming to be "exposing facts behind the lies" on the CPP-NPA-NDF, posted a picture of an ALCADDEV graduation ceremony and encircled men with guns on the graduation stage. The photo was supposedly proof that ALCADDEV and Booc taught Lumad children how to become members of the NPA. The post was false and fact-checked by [Rappler](#).⁹⁰
- **4 November 2021** : Internews researchers noted [a post](#) red-tagging Booc published by Col. Harold Cabunoc (994k followers), whose practice of red-tagging is previously detailed in this report. Booc published a tweet about Ka Oris, a senior NPA leader, who was killed in an encounter with the military. Cabunoc's post included a screenshot of a tweet by Booc in which he honored Ka Oris' efforts in environmental activism in Luman. While the screenshot itself was not manipulated, Cabunoc's claim in the caption of his post that ALCADDEV was an NPA recruitment school is false. The post is similar to other content Cabunoc shared that spread disinformation about ALCADDEV.⁹¹

After Booc was killed in February 2022, Internews observed a number of posts again red-tagging Booc, reinforcing the AFP's claim that Booc was a communist in order to justify his death. A day after Booc was killed, Badoy again red-tagged him and accused him of kidnapping, illegal detention, human trafficking, and child abuse charges on [her Facebook account](#). Badoy did not provide any evidence to support her claims and Booc had been cleared of the charges in 2021. Two days after his killing, the Philippine Anti-Communist League [posted](#) on Facebook calling for a purge of the education sector and for students, teachers, and professors considered "enemies of the State" to be removed. This followed several educational organizations condemning Booc's killing.

C. Red-Tagging of Journalists and Media Organizations

Journalists and media organizations are not exempt from being tagged as communist sympathizers, supporters, or members.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) [reported](#) in May 2022 that there had been at least 32 documented incidents of red-tagging of journalists since 2016. Those red-tagged are usually community and independent media journalists.

The following cases illustrate how online red-tagging, mostly state-backed, translates to offline harm. Some of these findings were also supported by interviews with journalists targeted by red-tagging.

Lady Ann “Icy” Salem

Lady Ann “Icy” Salem is a news editor of an alternative news media outlet *Manila Today*. According to its [Facebook page](#), the outlet “envision[s] expanding the horizons of online and social media use into public knowledge and discourse to translate awareness into public criticism and action.”

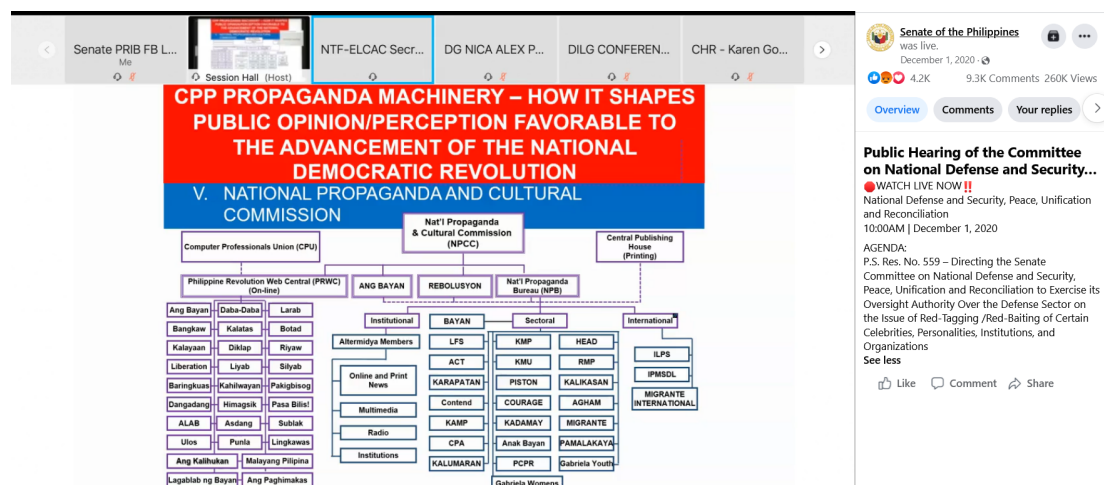
Salem graduated from the University of the Philippines with a bachelor’s degree in Broadcast Communication. She first worked as a journalist at Tudla Productions, another independent media outlet based in Metro Manila.

Salem also serves as a communications officer for the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT). In 2021, the independent journalist was also elected to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines’ (NUJP) board of directors.

Timeline

→ On **December 1, 2020**, NTF-ELCAC executive director Allen Capuyan accused Altermidya People's Alternative Media Network as part of the Communist Party of the Philippines's propaganda machinery. In his presentation, Capuyan named all media organizations under Altermidya, including Manila Today. This was the first time Manila Today was publicly red-tagged by government officials.

The senate hearing was streamed live on the Senate of the Philippines' [Facebook page](#) which as of this writing, has 260,000 views. The video was also cross-posted by major news outlets. Rappler's cross-post reached 55,000 views. With hundreds of thousands of views, the video likely reached huge numbers of Filipino viewers.



Picture 1. Screenshot of a presentation delivered by NTF-ELCAC, tagging independent media outfits as part of the CPP Propaganda Machinery.

→ On **December 10, 2020**, just nine days after the red-tagging spree inside the senate hearing, Salem was arrested by the police as armed state agents raided her home in Mandaluyong, Metro Manila. Salem was arrested along with trade unionist Rodrigo Esparago and both were charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives. On that day, five other activists in Metro Manila were also arrested in a series of raids conducted by the police.

- Underlying these arrests is the Republic Act of 10591 which prohibits the illegal possession of firearms and ammunition. The law has been regularly used against activists, journalists, and critics of the government. [Social media content](#) has also dubbed Judge Cecilyn-Burgos Villavert the “Search Warrant Queen” for her tendency to issue numerous search warrants which have led to the arrest of at least 76 individuals, mostly human rights activists. The same judge issued the search warrant against Salem and Esparago.
- On **February 5, 2021**, the Mandaluyong Regional Trial Court (RTC) cleared Salem and Esparago. A [Rappler report](#) said Judge Monique Quisumbing-Ignacio dismissed the cases after ruling that the search warrant issued by Villavert was null and void, therefore the firearms and explosives allegedly seized from the suspects' home were inadmissible evidence⁹².
 - On **March 5, 2021**, Salem was released from prison.

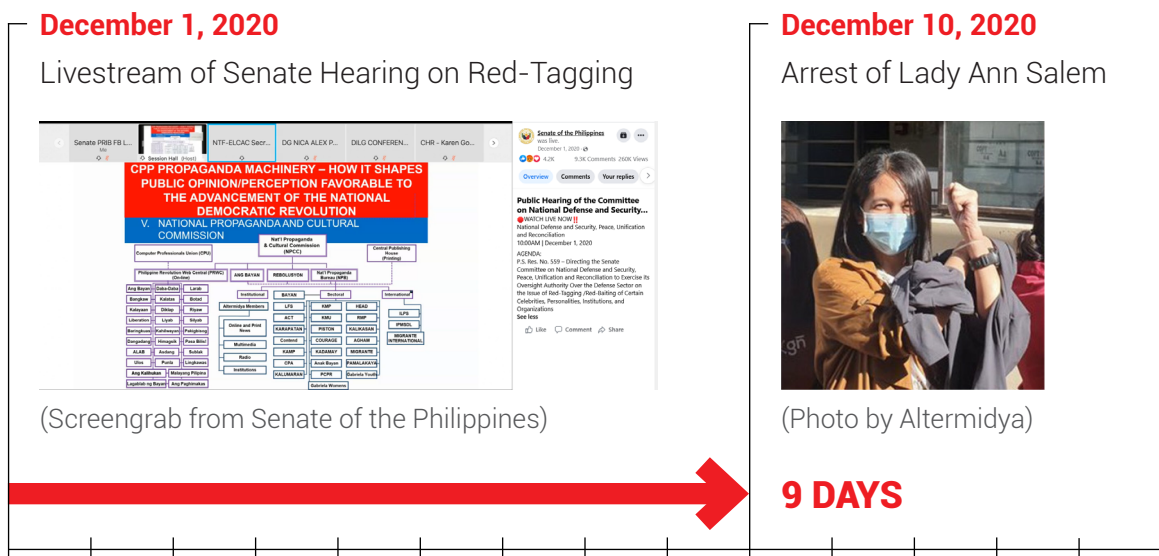


Figure 2. Illustration of the case of Manila Today Editor Lady Ann Salem.

While the social media post in this case was meant to inform the public on the Senate probe, rather than red-tag media organizations, the case demonstrates how such online publicity paved a way for red-tagging to reach wider audiences and discredit bona fide independent media as a communist propaganda machine.

Invariably, the post was not the only factor that led to Salem's arrest but it undeniably contributed, as it enabled and amplified the red-tagging of journalists.

Altermidya

Altermidya, formally known as *Altermidya - People's Alternative Media Network* is a network of independent and progressive media outfits, institutions and individuals.⁹³ Founded in 2014, the network is composed of different community media outfits from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, which include print, broadcast, and online media.

As a media organization that publishes stories directly from the communities, Altermidya has been at the receiving end of red-tagging as its reporting has been deemed critical of the government and its policies. Stories exposing human rights violations against various sectors of Philippine society coming from the alternative and community media outfits are most of the time deemed critical of the government, thus, resulting in attacks against the journalists working in independent media outfits.

Timeline

→ On **May 12, 2020**, NTF-ELCAC's Facebook page posted a statement titled "[REDS freeride on ABS-CBN issue](#)." In the statement, task force spokesperson Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade Jr, claimed that various individuals and organizations used the issue of the denial of ABS-CBN's franchise renewal bid to launch CPP propaganda. Parlade in the post said:

Well, this is what happened to 80 percent of those who made that media petition arising from the ABS-CBN brouhaha. The list of petitioners is long but does the rest of them understand that they are being exploited and dragged again, as we predicted a few days ago, by these commies?

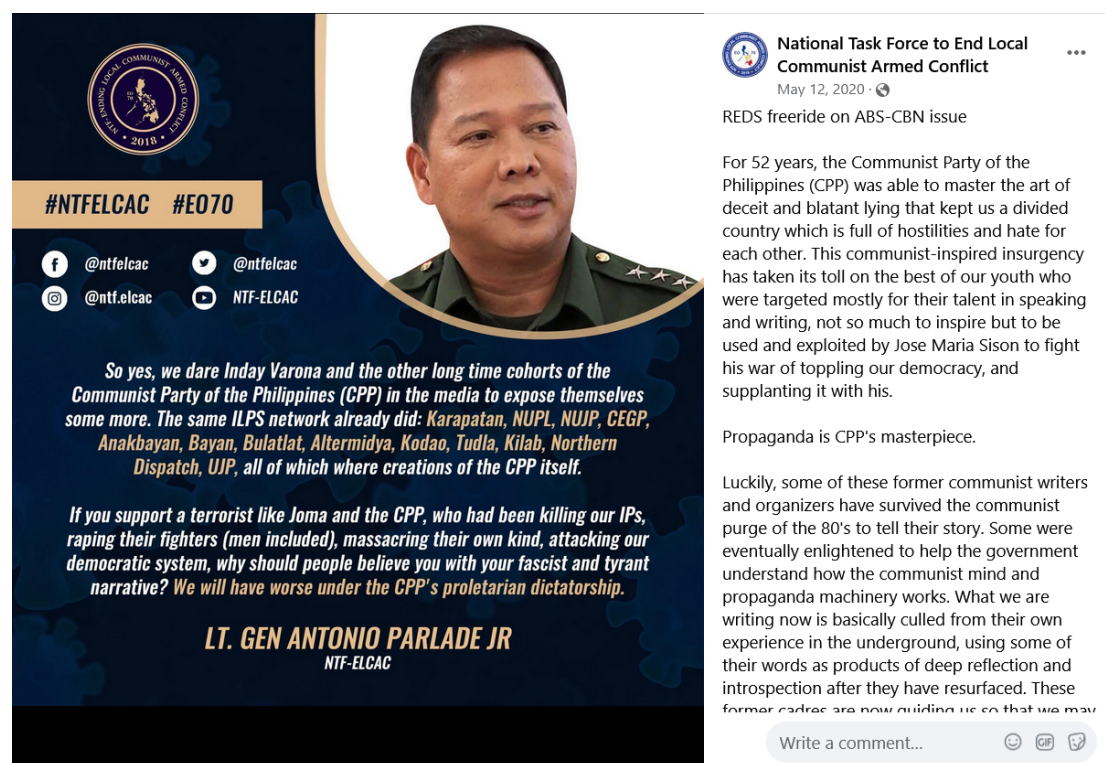
The military official then named organizations, including media organizations and practitioners, as 'cohorts' of the CPP. He said:

So yes, we dare Inday Varona and the other long-time cohorts of the CPP in the media to expose themselves some more. The same International League

of Peoples' Struggle network already did: Karapatan Alliance Philippines, National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, College Editors Guild of the Philippines, Anakbayan, Bayan, Bulatlat, Altermidya, Kodao, Tudla, Kilab, Northern Dispatch, UJP, all of which were creations of the CPP itself. We don't need to red-tag them. Just go to their websites and read how they build this franchise issue into an OUSTDuterte move.

This statement essentially red-tagged Inday Varona, a veteran and award-winning journalist who also served as former chairperson of the NUJP, along with other media organizations namely: NUJP, College Editors Guild of the Philippines, Bulatlat, Altermidya, Kodao, Tudla, Kilab, Northern Dispatch, and Union of Journalists of the Philippines by calling them 'creations' of the CPP.

The post was shared 770 times, with 76 comments and at least 1,000 reactions as of this writing.



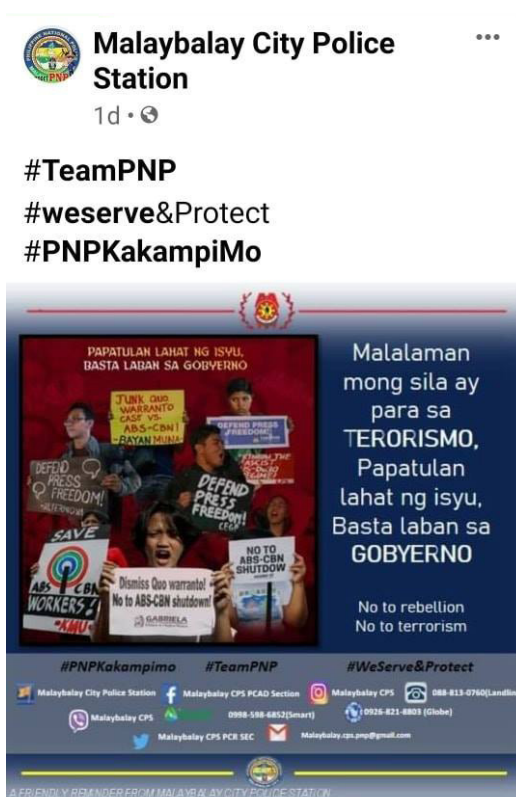
Picture 2. Screenshot NTF-ELCAC's post red-tagging organizations including media organizations and journalists.

→ On **July 15, 2020**, two months after the NTF-ELCAC red-tagging statement, the Facebook page of Malaybalay City Police Station, a regional station located in Bukidnon province in Mindanao, posted a series of graphic cards also red-tagging media practitioners.

The content is now inaccessible as it was already taken down by the post author following protests against the regional police station. However, [documentation](#) from the NUJP included screenshots of the content. The photo in one of the posts included a photo of Altermidya reporter Adrian Puse holding a placard that says "Defend Press Freedom". The text alongside the photo read, *"You'll know they are for **TERRORISM**, will ride on any issue, as long as it's against the **GOVERNMENT**."*

According to NUJP, their colleagues from Northern Mindanao said the same poster was shared on Viber with reporters covering Police Regional Office Region 10 and has also been removed by the sharer after journalists called it out. Mindanao-based independent media *Davao Today* [reported](#) on July 17, 2020 that the Malaybalay Police Station had already taken down the post and issued an apology statement.⁹⁴

→ On **June 24, 2021**, Altermidya and independent media outfit *Bulatlat* reported that they continued to face red-tagging on their social media platforms (specifically in messages and comment sections) and were subjected to cyberattacks. A report from Interaksyon cited Qurium Media's report which detailed the cyberattacks experienced by Altermidya from May to June 2021 in the form of a distributed denial of service (DDoS).



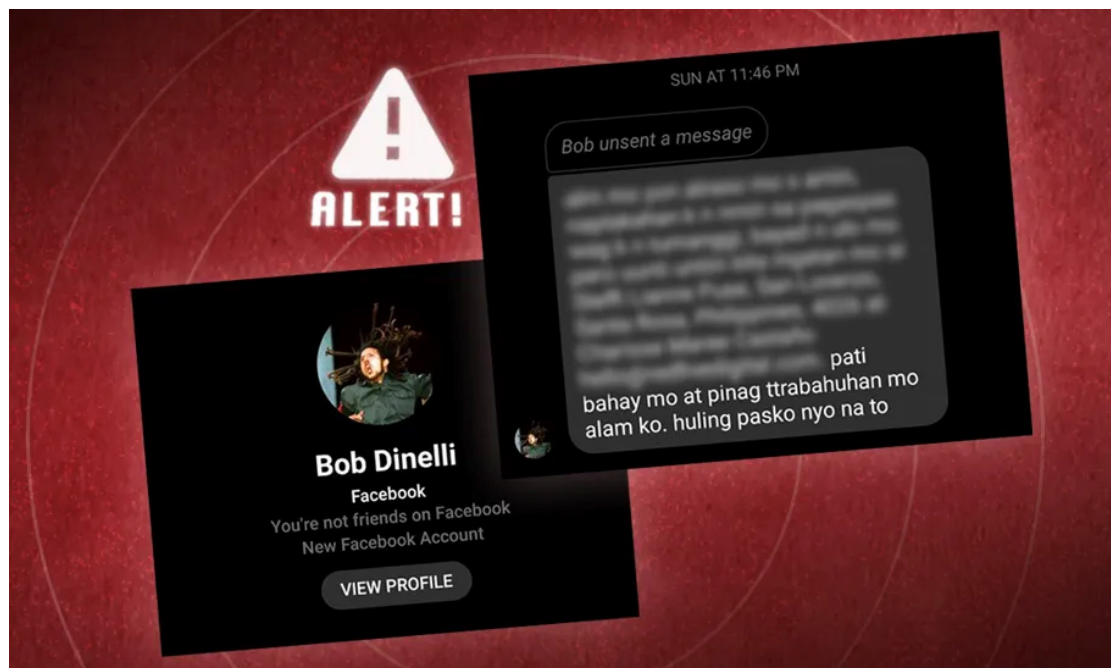
Picture 3. Screenshot of Malaybalay Police's post on July 15, 2020 tagging journalists as supporters of rebellion and terrorism.

Qurium stated, "During the past month, Qurium has received brief but frequent denial attacks against the Philippine independent media outlets *Bulatlat* and *Altermidya*, as well as the human rights group *Karapatan*."

Another [report](#) from *Inquirer.net*, still citing the findings of Qurium, meanwhile stated that the cyberattacks were traced to computer networks owned by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Philippine Army.⁹⁵ *Bulatlat* pointed out that the attacks were "politically motivated and state-sponsored attacks after the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict had consistently labeled us as communist fronts for pursuing journalism for the people."

The cyberattacks were also deemed by *Bulatlat* and *Altermidya* as an assault to press freedom as it endangered their websites which are being used to deliver reliable news and information to communities and the public.

→ On **December 19, 2021**, *Altermidya* reporter and media safety officer Adrian Puse, whose photo appeared in the red-tagging post of the Malaybalay Police Station, received death threats through Facebook Messenger.



Picture 4. Statement card of *Altermidya* on death threats vs Adrian Puse

According to a [statement](#) released by Altermidya, Puse received the threat from the account “Bob Dinelli” on Facebook⁹⁶. The person sent threats such as “uunti-untiin kita (*I will slowly come after you*),” “alam ko bahay mo at pinagtatrabahuhan mo (*I know where you live and where you work*),” and “huling pasko mo na ito (*This is your last Christmas*).”

Altermidya added that the sender also named Puse's sister, her address, and his girlfriend's name and email address in the threat. The user account was taken down by Facebook after being reported.

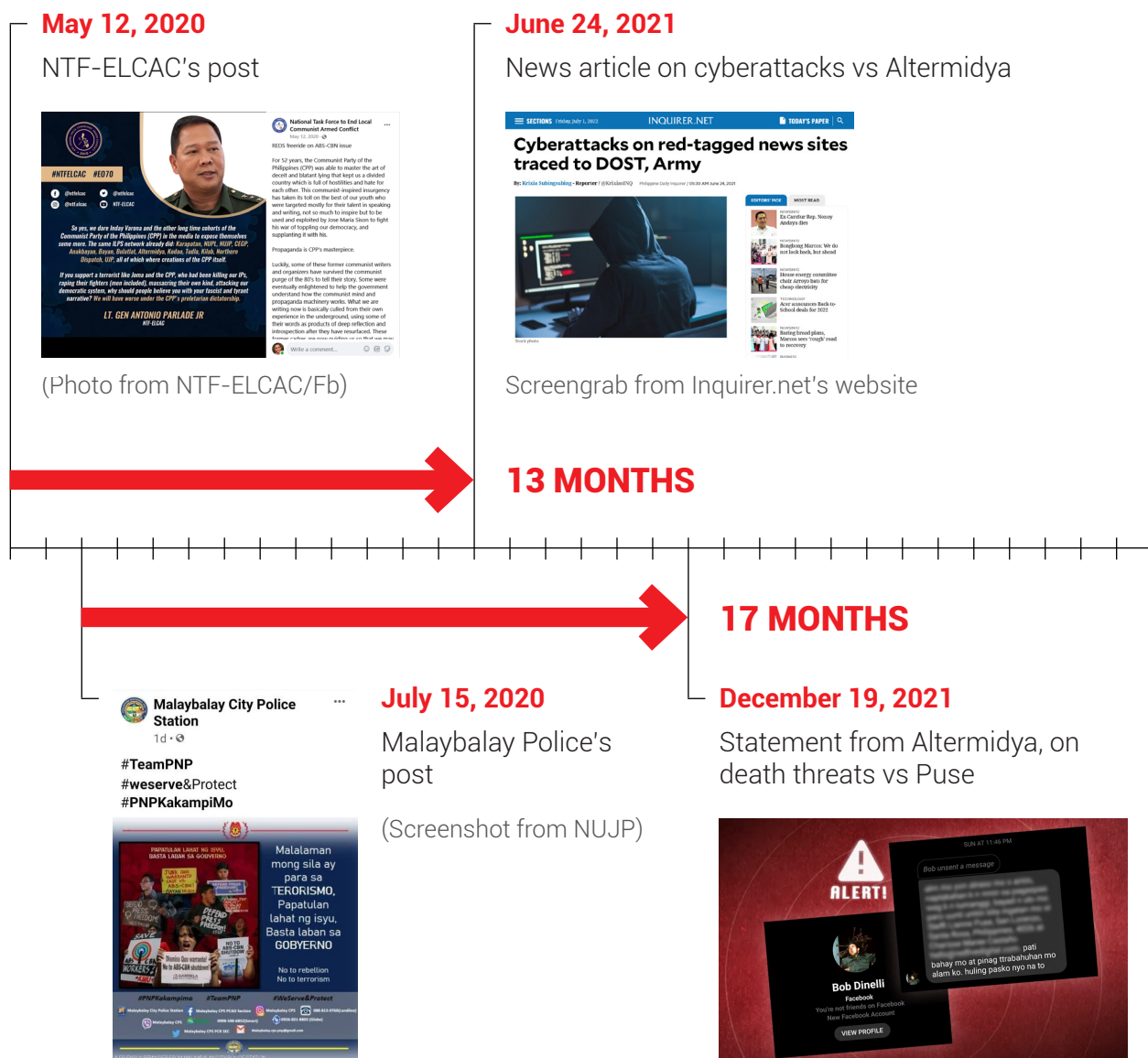


Figure 3. Illustration of the case of Altermidya and its reporter Adrian Puse.

While the time interval between the online content publication and the resulting harm took several months, the victims confirmed to the Internews researcher that they consider such posts as contributory to the harm they encountered.

In an interview, Puse shared with the researcher that the death threats resulted in him worrying more not just about his physical safety, but also about his digital security.

"The incident caused me to limit my actions in personal and professional environments. I can no longer come in and out of my home alone," he said. "It's tiring to be extra vigilant all the time. It's also mentally draining because I have to always think about it." "On social media, I limited all my accounts, they're no longer public, so even with posts I used to share from Altermidya, I can no longer reach as many people as before," Puse added.

The independent media journalist's case demonstrates that red-tagging can not only cause psychological and physical harm but also damages to one's career.

ABS-CBN

ABS-CBN was formerly one of the two leading media networks in the Philippines, competing with GMA Network in dominating Philippine radio and television. But on May 5, 2020, the media giant officially went off-air following the Philippine government's denial of its franchise renewal bid.

From 2018 to 2019, President Duterte slammed and cursed the network for failing to air his campaign ads in 2016. Duterte said he will reject the franchise renewal of the network and that he will "see to it" that it is shut down. Since then, the network has been accused of bias and failure to pay its obligations such as taxes.

Duterte and Marcos' supporters continue to harass the mainstream network for such reasons. Journalist groups and press freedom advocates assert that the shutdown was an assault on press freedom claiming that it resulted from Duterte's political vendetta.

Timeline

- On **December 9, 2021**, media outlet SMNI posted a news report on the statement of SMNI owner Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, whose religious leadership has also been bombarded with controversy, red-tagging the ABS-CBN. SMNI journalist Angel Pastor shared the video.

In the video, Quiboloy likened ABS-CBN to the Communist Party of the Philippines. He said like the CPP, ABS-CBN has for a long time maintained a reputation of being almost indispensable in the media industry. For Quiboloy, the tables have turned as more independent media outfits are being established in the country, like the SMNI. Like the communist forces, ABS-CBN is also “going down” under Duterte’s leadership, he added.



Picture 5. Screenshot of post from SMNI’s Angel Pastor, of a video that compares ABS-CBN to Communist Party of the Philippines.

- On **December 11, 2021**, just a few days after such pronouncement, ABS-CBN was among the media organizations whose websites were **targeted**⁹⁷ by distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, along with Rappler and Vera Files.

ABS-CBN first reported the attacks on December 11, resulting in their website being shut down. The attacks lasted for 6 hours. Four days later, on December 15, Rappler was targeted next, shutting down its website for two hours. On December 16, Vera Files also reported DDoS attacks.

In a [report](#) by Rappler, it noted that: 1) The three media organizations are all known for critical reporting that has angered the Duterte administration. Both Vera Files and Rappler are third-party fact-check partners of Facebook and; 2) All three organizations have been subjected to tremendous attacks on social media by pro-administration social media influencers and social media propaganda channels⁹⁸.

On **February 24, 2022**, Rappler reported an update on the issue, saying that hacker group known as *Pinoy Vendetta* had claimed credit for the series of DDoS attacks targeting not just mainstream media networks but also the website of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Rappler reported:

On December 11, 2021, the day the news website of ABS-CBN went down for several hours, Facebook page *Pinoy Vendetta* published a quote from African-American leader Malcolm X: "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent. Media has the power to influence minds, ideas, behaviors, and attitudes of the masses."⁹⁹

In a separate [news article](#),¹⁰⁰ Manila Bulletin revealed that the group behind the DDoS attacks against another mainstream media outfit CNN Philippines was also *Pinoy Vendetta*. According to the report, an individual known as "Abdul" claimed they targeted these sites due "to their biased reporting."

"For context, *Pinoy Vendetta* is suspected of being Pro-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The other reason given for the attack is to 'proved (sic) that their security is weakshit (sic).'" wrote Manila Bulletin.

The same article by Rappler also reported that the hacker group earlier announced its support for the NTF-ELCAC:

The group, in August 2021, made clearer its support for the government's National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). In a post, the group vowed: "I as a member of *Pinoy Vendetta* hacking group. I personally support NTF-ELCAC sa mission nilang buwagin at wakasan ang CPP-NPA-NDF na 52 taong nang ginugulo ang mga Pilipino. d we can even down all the government shitty websites too. Pero kayong mga politiko kayo na

gustong ma defund ang budget para matugis ang mga salot ng bayan at yung mga politikong hindi kaya kundinahin ang gawain ng CPP NPA NDF terrorists, humanda kayo t4ng1n4 nyong lahat isa din kayo sa mga kanser ng Pilipinas. AMEN!"

(I, as a member of Pinoy Vendetta hacking group, personally support NTF-ELCAC in their mission to bring down and end the CPP-NPA-NDF, which has been creating disorder for 52 years. We can down all the shitty government websites too. But you, politicians, who want to defund efforts to pursue the scourge of the country, and the politicians who can't condemn what the CPP-NPA-NDF terrorists do – get ready, sons of bitches, you are cancer to the Philippines. Amen.)

(Rappler, 2022)



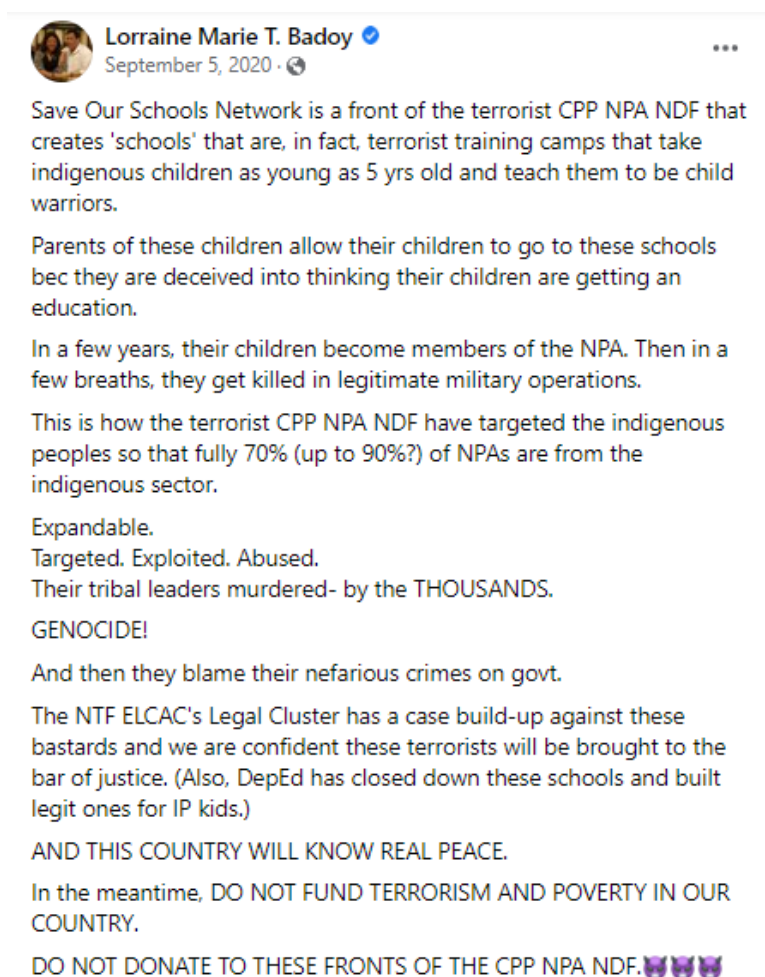
Figure 4. Illustration of the case of ABS-CBN

While these news reports do not confirm that the ABS-CBN was attacked because of being branded as supporters or part of communist organizations, the uncovered political leanings of the perpetrator implies a strong motive pointing to that direction.

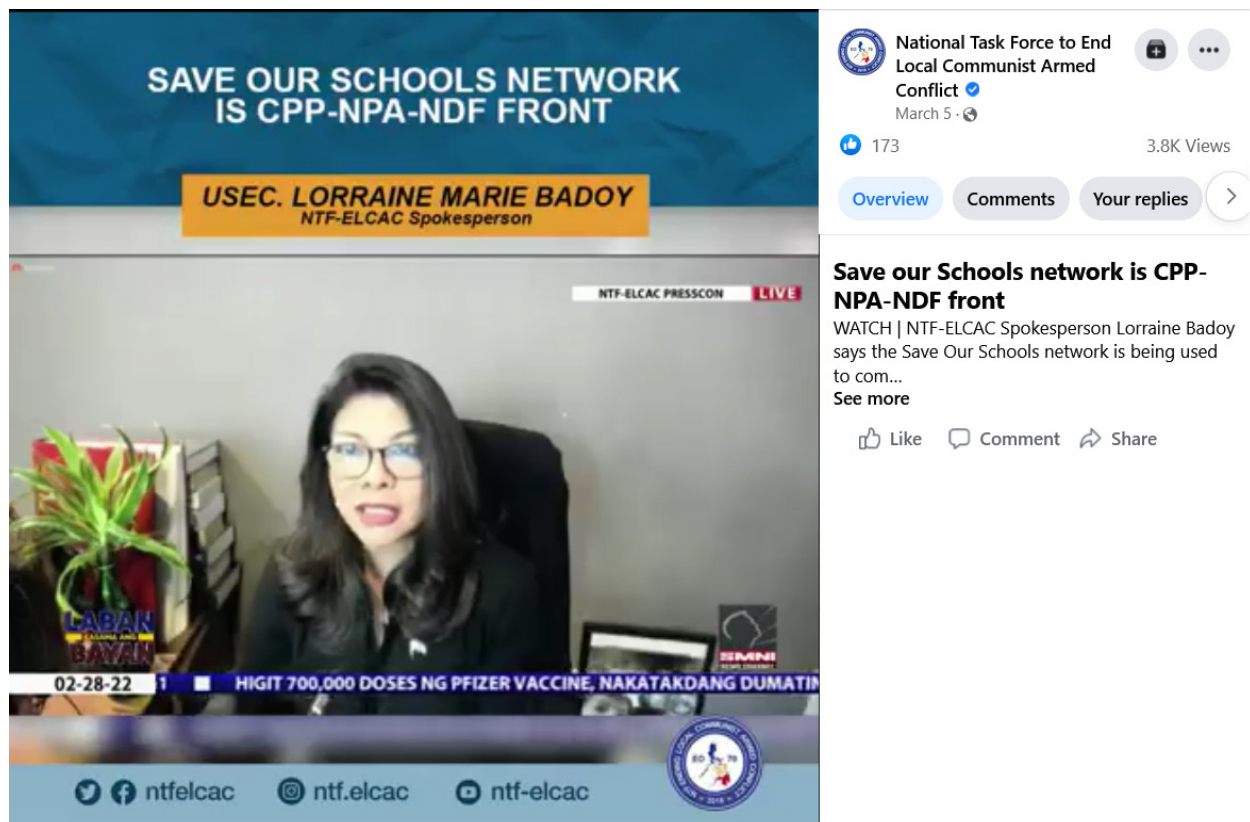
D. Red-tagging of Civil Society

Save Our Schools Network

Save Our Schools Network is a network of [children-focused NGOs](#), church-based groups and other stakeholders advocating for children's right to education. The organization is dedicated to providing education to children in Lumad indigenous communities.¹⁰¹ This engagement with the Lumad community, however, has made them subject to red-tagging as fronts of the CPP-NPA-NDF (see pictures 6 and 7). This resulted in further heckling, name-calling, and the [brief detention](#) of ten children by the local police.



Picture 6. Screenshot of a red-tagging post made by Presidential Communications Undersecretary against Save Our Schools Network



Picture 7. Screenshot of the video posted by Presidential Communications Undersecretary alleging Save Our Schools Network as CPP-NPA-NDF front

University of the Philippines

As noted in other cases of this report, the University of the Philippines is a frequent target of red-tagging by the NTF-ELCAC. The government task force red-tagged UP Dilmann student publication Sinag and two other youth organizations, as a “front organization” of the CPP-NPA-NDF (see picture 8). The post led to harassment of Sinag's Facebook page. Comments included those calling the group “leeches,” and “pests in the society” (see picture 9), while other comments include urging for violent actions against the groups.

The NUJP-UP Dilman chapter who was also red-tagged by the NTF-ELCAC's Facebook page released a statement noting the tag “endangers the safety and security of our members.” Following the statement, Tinig ng Plaridel, the official student publication of the UP Dilman College of Mass Communication, tweeted to announce they had received death threats from an anonymous account. They had recently been red-tagged for their articles on human rights

abuses by the Duterte administration. The newspaper later published an article that detailed the harassment experienced by UP students after they were red-tagged. The article also noted UP Cebu Professor Zoe Maria Sanchez received death threats via text message after allegations that she was a student recruiter, propagandist, and New People's Army teacher.



Picture 8. Screenshot of post posted on NTF-ELCAC FB page

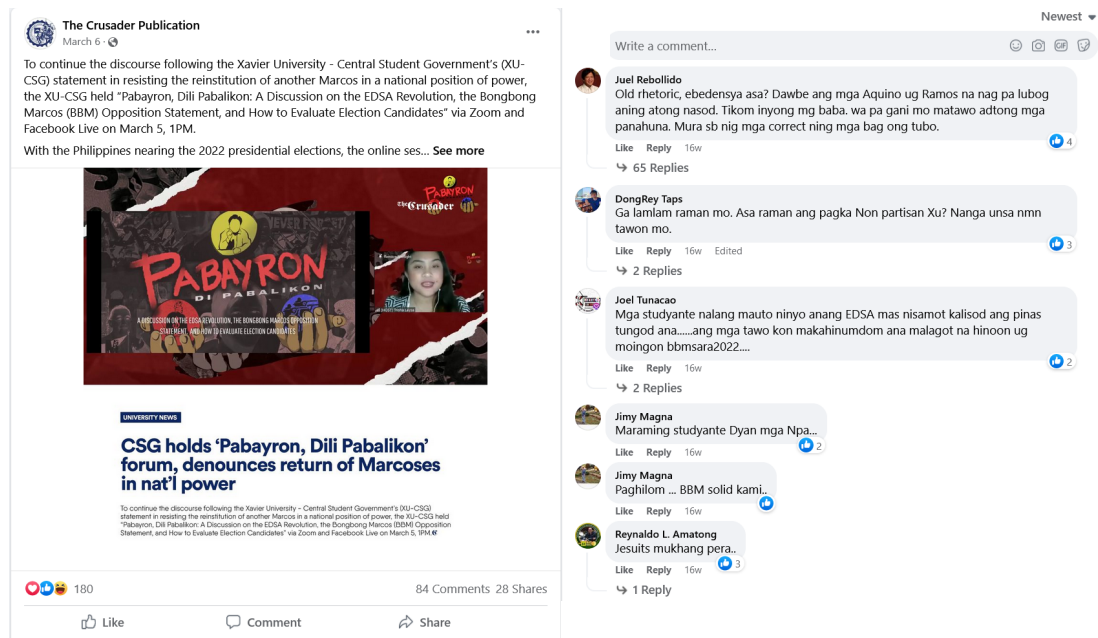


Picture 9. Screenshot of comments found on Sinag's official FB page

Xavier University

In Mindanao, Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan decried the red-tagging of its faculty and its immersion program after a post circulated on Facebook insinuating that the immersion activity was a front of its ties to the CPP NPA.¹⁰² The now unavailable post further claimed that several alumni of the program in Europe and the US are helping fund the terrorist group.

The red-tagging of the university has further reinforced people's perception about the institution as a breeding ground for rebels as seen from this [insight](#) reported in March (seen below).



Picture 9. Screenshot of comments found on Sinag's official FB page

E. Red-tagging and Violence Against Women Public Figures

In its report on the Philippine human rights situation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the use of social media to red-tag and harass civil society and opposition politicians, with women "particularly subjected to misogynistic comments."¹⁰³ It also noted how harmful rhetoric from the highest levels of the government have become tantamount to incitement to violence, including rape "jokes".

Under the Duterte administration, women journalists, opposition politicians and public figures have been uniquely targeted with gendered attacks for the work that they do and/or for exercising their right to political participation. At the helm of these attacks is President Rodrigo Duterte, who has gained notoriety for using misogynistic and often violent language to lash out against women who are vocal critics of his policies. Some of the prominent women figures who have faced this include Senator Leila de Lima, whom he called “an immoral woman” and accused of having an affair with her driver in retaliation to her critiques of the war against drugs;¹⁰⁴ Vera Files’ Ellen Tordesillas, whom he referred to as “every inch a prostitute,”¹⁰⁵ and Vice President Leni Robredo, whom he dismissed as a “weak leader”¹⁰⁶ and sexually objectified in a public forum.¹⁰⁷

The red-tagging of women figures is often accompanied by misogynistic and sexist hate speech. Moreover, as the cases in this section show, being red-tagged online by high officials of the Duterte administration makes women targets of intimidation, harassment, slut-shaming and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence both online and offline.

Liza Soberano, Catriona Gray and Angel Locsin

Liza Soberano, an actor and celebrity, spoke at a webinar organized by Gabriela Youth in 2020 on International Day of the Girl Child to encourage influencers to use their platforms to defend the rights of women and girls.

Following Soberano’s appearance on the online forum, former NTF-ELCAC Spokesperson Lt. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr. issued a veiled threat against her. He wrote in a statement published on [NTF-ELCAC’s page](#): “There’s still a chance to abdicate that group.” Otherwise, he said, she will “suffer the same fate” as slain activist Josephine Anne Lapira. In the same statement, he issued a similar warning to Miss Universe 2018 winner Catriona Gray and went on to claim, without proof, that actor Angel Locsin’s sister, Angela Colmenares, was a member of the New People’s Army (NPA).

The NTF-ELCAC post drew comments that sexualize Soberano. One FB user (Polskie Ko ToWers) commented: “*The Commander will hit the jackpot when Angel and Liza go up the mountains.*”¹⁰⁸ Another commenter (Jerwin Mendoza) provided a rejoinder: “*They will be taken together at once, their only break is peeing. Haha.*”



Picture 11. Screenshot of Lt. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr.'s statement on NTF-ELCAC's Facebook Page

The red-tagging of these celebrities was seen by many Filipinos as an affront to women's right to freedom of expression and political participation, prompting them to join the social media campaign "[#YesToRedLipstick](#) [#NoToRedTagging](#) [#DefendFilipinoWomen](#)" to show solidarity not just for the three, but to all women who are standing up for human rights.¹⁰⁹ After Parlade's statement, Catriona Gray posted a video on Instagram that shows her being freed from hands covering her mouth, with this caption:

Please don't ever allow your voice to be silenced. You never know [whose] life may be impacted by your words. You never know who you'll help feel seen, courageous or comforted. When you speak up for yourself, know that in sharing your stories, you're speaking up for others too.¹¹⁰

This statement drew flak from several institutions and organizations, including the Commission on Human Rights which called Parlade's statement "tantamount to harassment and red-tagging."¹¹¹

Parlade denied that he red-tagged Soberano, saying that he was merely protecting her from Gabriela's ties with communist insurgents.

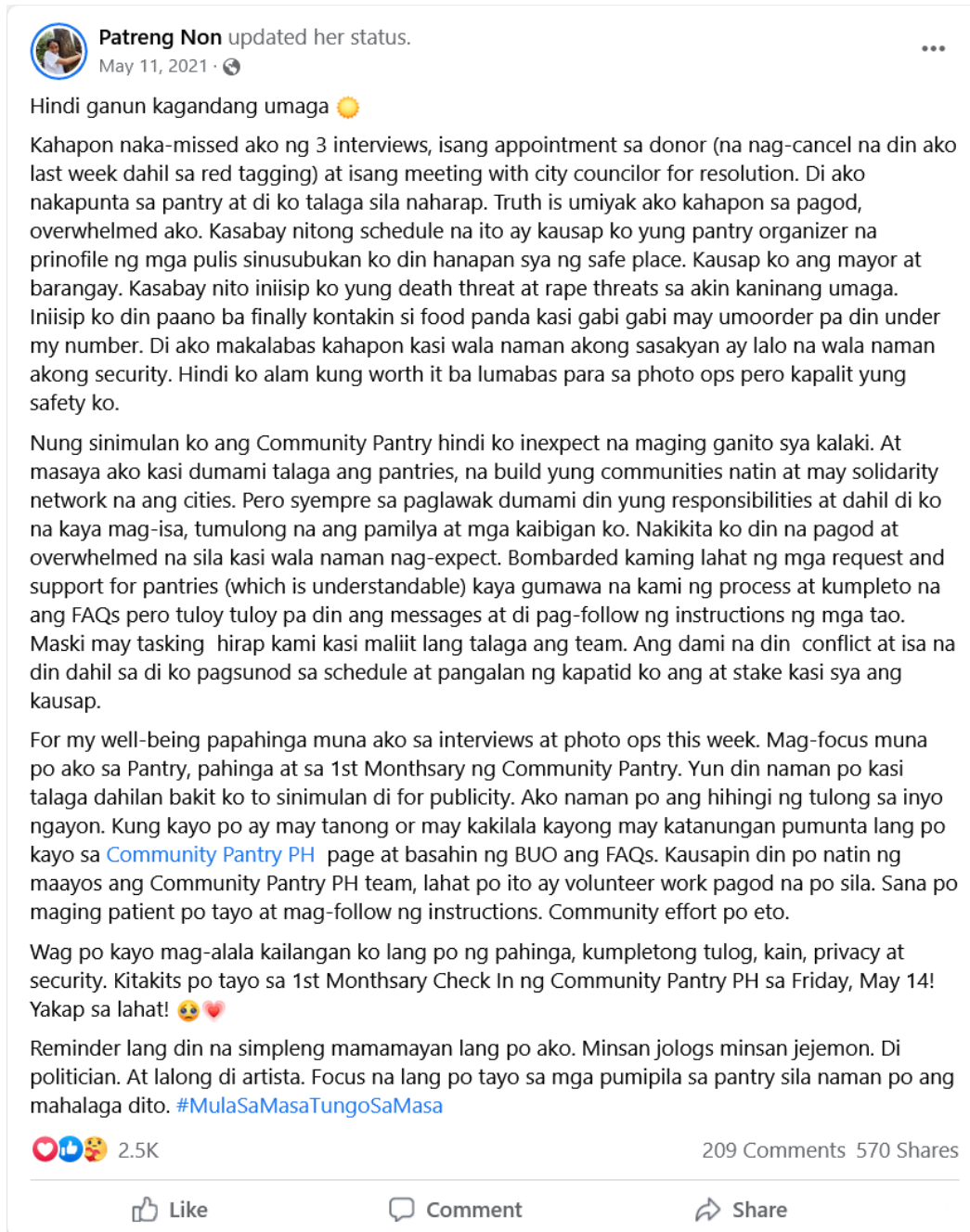
Patreng Non

Ana Patricia 'Patreng' Non is one example of an involuntary public figure who became the target of online harassment, gender-based hate speech and threats of violence as a result of being red-tagged on Facebook. A small-scale entrepreneur, Non started the Maginhawa Community Pantry which snowballed into a country-wide movement.

The red-tagging began on April 19, 2021 through a post on the page 'Peace Philippines'¹¹² that is believed to be linked to the NTF-ELCAC. The post claimed that the community pantries were being used by the CPP-NPA-NDF to recruit members. The post was shared by the official NTF-ELCAC page and the Quezon City Police page, forcing Non to shut down the Maginhawa Community Pantry due to fear for her own, and fellow volunteers', safety, particularly after other community pantry organizers reported that they had been profiled by the police.¹¹³ Non reopened Maginhawa Community Pantry the following day, after Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte expressed support for the initiative and assured the safety of the organizers.

While Non was not initially named in posts that red-tagged community pantries, she soon became the target of tirades from NTF-ELCAC officials. Lorraine Badoy in a post dated April 21, 2020¹¹⁴, warned people against donating to community pantries. She wrote: "Because AP Non or Ka Patring, according to former CPP-NPA-NDF cadres who know her, is a member of the underground mass organization ARMAS (Artists and Writers of the People) that believes in the violent overthrow of the government."

Her online red-tagging led to Non receiving rape threats and gender-based harassment that caused her great psychological harm.¹¹⁵ In a Facebook post, she expressed fear of leaving her house to go to the pantry and attend press interviews. She wrote "I couldn't go out yesterday because I do not have a car, much less a security [guard]. I don't know if it is worth venturing out for photo ops at the expense of my safety.") In the same post, she announced that she would be taking a month-long break from the initiative to focus on her well-being.



Picture 12. Screenshot of Patreng Non's post where she shared that she received death and rape threats as a result of being red-tagged by government officials.

To this day, Non continues to fear for her safety. On 14 April 2022, Non's mother, Zena Bernardo, filed a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman against NTF-ELCAC Spokesperson Lorraine Badoy for red-tagging and "mental and psychological" torture of her daughter.¹¹⁶

Sarah Elago

Sarah Elago, a House of Representatives member representing the youth-focused Kabataan Partylist, is another public figure that was targeted by gendered online attacks as a result of being red-tagged on Facebook. Elago was among the most red-tagged figures under the Duterte administration. According to Agence France-Presse, in 2020 alone, her name featured in over 14,000 public posts on Facebook that also mentioned the New People's Army (NPA).¹¹⁷

One post on a pro-government page called "Duterte Fact News," which has more than 34,000 followers, shows Elago in a police mugshot holding a charge card that accuses her of recruiting communist rebels. Fact-checker AFP Philippines found that the photo had been manipulated.¹¹⁸ It was shared hundreds of times and drew comments calling for Elago to be killed or raped.



Picture 13. Screenshot of the post with the doctored photo of Sarah Elago that falsely shows she was arrested for rebellion

Elago has since sued NTF-ELCAC's Lorraine Badoy for using the agency's resources to attack her and her party via social media posts and other platforms.¹¹⁹ She and other members of the Congress from the Makabayan Bloc have likewise filed a complaint with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) against Badoy and other NTF-ELCAC officials for red-tagging partylist groups, as well as former vice-president Leni Robredo.¹²⁰ The Inter-Parliamentary Union called on Philippine authorities to take further action to prevent and punish online disinformation, highlighting threats against Elago which "not only discredit her but put her physical integrity at risk."¹²¹

IV. Platform Failures and Recommendations

To address issues around red-tagging Meta must take significant steps both to consistently enforce its current policies and to adjust policy settings to ensure that platform users in the Philippines are protected. Beyond enforcement and policy improvements, Meta must improve its transparency and engagement with civil society and media in the Philippines.

As well evidenced in this report, red-tagging is harmful to users of Facebook and other platforms. The practice has the effect of driving activists, journalists, and a range of other independent voices off these essential platforms. For those that continue to use social media, self-censorship may be required to protect themselves from being falsely labeled and then further attacked. In the worst case, red-tagging can be followed by offline harms, including harassment, arrest, and even extreme violence. The point of red-tagging is to intimidate and silence, and Meta and other platforms have allowed red taggers to achieve this aim.

Prevailing platform practices and policies of digital content moderation are failing concerning the issue of red-tagging in the Philippines. There is an open question, however, over whether this failure is primarily one of policy or enforcement. Red-tagging is often able to fall between the cracks of platform policies, including Facebook's community standards. Posts with prohibited slurs or explicit incitement to violence will likely be moderated when reported (and potentially proactively detected through automated processes), however, unless these are present, red-tagging has consistently been allowed.

Facebook Community Standards

Bullying and Harassment

Under Facebook's [community standards for bullying and harassment](#), different rules are applied to different categories of people - for example 'private individuals', 'public figures', or 'minors'. Activists and journalists are categorized as 'limited scope public figures' if their primary fame is limited to their activity in these fields, although the line between being a 'private individual' and a 'limited scope public figure' is not made explicit in publicly available policies, and it is reasonable to assume that there may be some gray area for people who do not have a high profile. The term 'limited scope public figure' also covers people who 'become famous through involuntary means', which arguably may apply to some targets of red-tagging.

Specific forms of bullying are prohibited under Facebook's Community Standards if directed at a 'limited scope public figure', including journalists and activists. It is prohibited to draw attention to a physical characteristic - an example given is to 'negatively draw attention' to a journalist's nose or ears - or to compare them to an animal or inanimate objects, such as a 'monkey' or a 'potato'. By contrast, it is permissible to label a journalist or activist a 'terrorist' or 'communist', or falsely state that they have sympathies or affiliations with these groups.

Whilst allegations of terrorism do not qualify under Facebook's bullying and harassment policy 'tier 4' designation prohibited against 'limited scope public figures', they may qualify under 'Tier 5', which applies to 'private adults (who must self-report) or any private minors or involuntary minor public figures'. This policy prohibits:

"Negative character or ability claims, except in the context of criminal allegations and business reviews against adults. We allow criminal allegations so that people can draw attention to personal experiences or offline events. In cases in which criminal allegations pose offline harm to the named individual, however, we may remove them."

This policy would seem to provide a clear rationale under Facebook's community standards to remove certain examples of red-tagging. In the Philippine context, the practice of red-tagging inherently implies a criminal allegation; the Anti-Terrorism Law condones state security forces the power to arrest suspected terrorists "without notice and judicial process."¹²² As the examples listed throughout this report demonstrate, the potential for 'offline harm' resulting from

such allegations is clear and irrefutable, including offline harassment, professional exclusion, unwarranted arrest, or physical violence.

Notably, the 'tier 5' bullying and harassment policy regarding criminal allegations explicitly does not apply to journalists and activists, or other 'limited scope public figures'. The corollary of this is that under these policies it is acceptable to target a journalist or human rights defender with unfounded criminal allegations even if there is a clear precedent that such labels may lead to offline harm. 'Private individuals' are protected (so long as they 'self-report') but those with an established public profile are not.

The result of this policy contortion is that under Meta's guidelines it is prohibited to say that a journalist has a big nose, but it is allowable to label them a terrorist without any evidence, even when this action has a high likelihood of resulting in offline harm. This cannot possibly be considered an optimal balance of policy outcomes.

Fortunately, this policy failure is relatively straightforward to rectify. We recommend the following steps:

- Meta should add '*criminal allegations which pose offline harm to the named individual*' to the list of forms of harassment prohibited under 'tier 4' which covers 'limited scope public figures' including journalists and activists.
- Meta should confirm localized policy guidance for the Philippines that 'red-tagging' has the clear potential to pose offline harm to named individuals.

Neither of these changes should be controversial. Together they would protect both 'limited scope public figures' and ordinary citizens from dangerous harassment through red-tagging. Journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and others would be protected by removing their wholly unjustified exclusion from this existing policy. Ordinary citizens who are already covered under 'tier 5' would have these protections strengthened through clear policy guidance in specific relation to red-tagging in the Philippines.

Mass Harassment

Meta's community standards for Bullying and Harassment also include categories for which the company will require "additional information/context" to take enforcement action. One of these categories is 'mass harassment'. When this additional context is provided by a Trusted Partner or other qualified party, Meta will:

Remove directed mass harassment, when:

- *Targeting, via any surface, 'individuals at heightened risk of offline harm', defined as:*
 - *Human rights defenders*
 - *Minors*
 - *Victims of violent events/tragedies*
 - *Opposition figures in at-risk countries during election periods*
 - *Government dissidents who have been targeted based on their dissident status*
 - *Ethnic and religious minorities in conflict zones*
 - *Member of a designated and recognizable at-risk group*¹²³

As evidenced in this report, a red-tag by Badoy, the NTF-ELCAC, and other officials listed above frequently elicits a mass response by Marcos/Duterte supporters directed at the profile of the individual or organization. Those individuals, as listed above, fall into each of the categories that Meta defines as "individuals at heightened risk of offline harm."

In this case, the failure is not one of policy but simply a lack of enforcement. As a Trusted Partner, Internews has frequently worked with Meta to provide 'additional information/context' in such cases, including many of the cases outlined in this report, yet Meta has largely declined to take any action. The Trusted Partner program is the designated channel for context and subject matter experts to raise issues where the extra context may be needed to take action under these policies. Meta has regularly failed to take action in these cases, even when 'mass harassment' is clearly present, the target is one of their nominated categories of 'individuals at heightened risk of harm', and a designated 'Trusted Partner' has provided them with extensive 'additional information/context' required to enforce the policy. No satisfactory justifications for this inaction have been provided.

To rectify this issue Meta simply needs to enforce its existing community standards. Beyond this, Meta must significantly improve transparency around decision-making processes in these cases.

Dangerous Individuals and Organizations

Under this policy, Meta prohibits 'praise, substantive support and representations' of what it considers 'Dangerous Individuals and Organizations'. This includes entities designated by the U.S. government as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) or Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs)¹²⁴, as well as various 'violent non-state actors', which they define as any non-state actor that "engages in purposive and planned acts of violence primarily against a government military or other armed groups."

In the Philippines, several Islamic organizations are listed under Meta's Dangerous Organizations policy, as well as the CPP and its founder, Joma Sison. The company does not appear to explicitly list the NPA or the NDF despite those organizations being listed as terrorist organizations by the Philippine government.¹²⁵ While Meta provides a detailed definition of what constitutes a Dangerous Organization, it must also address content that falsely accuses organizations or individuals as terrorist organizations or members of those groups. Such a gap in policy enables organizations like the NTF-ELCAC to spread disinformation on human rights activists in the name of state security.

State actors are considered exempt from Meta's policies around Dangerous Organizations and Individuals, even if they would otherwise qualify for their use or advocacy of violence or atrocities. This exemption applies to state agencies which, as in the case of the NTF-ELCAC, repeatedly post content that praises and substantively supports state-sanctioned violence. Content posted by the NTF-ELCAC and affiliated officials regularly legitimizes violence and warrantless arrests by making claims that the harassment and violence against individuals are legally justified without providing evidence.

Meta must develop policies within its Community Standards that address state actors that consistently promote or undertake violence. Although this report requests policy changes specific to the Philippines, such an addition to the Community Standards could benefit human rights defenders and journalists globally who are facing a rise in authoritarian regimes.

Transparency and Organizational Change

While the HRIA of the Philippines was an important step, the report fell short of the transparency asked for by CSOs. The HRIA acknowledged significant human rights issues but failed to disclose the extent and scope of investigations the company has completed on issues such as red-tagging. If Meta is confident that the Facebook platform was not misused in regards to red-tagging, it should provide the assessment that led its investigators to that conclusion.

Meta's Community Standards Enforcement Report only includes global metrics for enforcement of policies such as those around 'bullying and harassment or hate speech. These global aggregates tell us nothing meaningful about how Meta enforces its policies in the Philippines. To rectify this Meta must publish a country-specific report that details community standards enforcement against accounts active in the Philippines.

Key Meta policies in relation to red-tagging, such as the policy on mass harassment, can only be activated if 'additional information/context' is provided by an expert or Trusted Partner, however there is neither transparency nor accountability around this process. Whilst protections must be put in place to protect organizations or individuals who may have contributed to this process, there are key metrics that could be shared without any risk. At a minimum, Meta should share the number of individual posts, accounts, or pages that have been reviewed in this manner in the Philippines, and the number for which any enforcement action was taken. Meta should also include the number of reports which were raised by government or state actors through this channel (note, this is quite different from official government requests for content removals, which are reported separately).

A key area where transparency is lacking is the decision-making process when it comes to policies and enforcement concerning red-tagging. Meta's Philippines-based staff creates a point of concern given the potential for pressure to be placed on both the individuals and the company from authorities. The fact that these staff members are responsible for engaging with the government and may be contributing to policy enforcement decisions creates a separate but related potential for conflict of interest. To rectify this Meta should create and publicly commit to a firewall between Philippines-based staff and any decisions relating to the enforcement of policies. This will require hiring staff with expertise and contextual understanding who are based offshore.

Stakeholder Engagement

Meta's partnerships in the Philippines are significant but risk becoming empty gestures in the present political environment. Fact-checking partnerships with Vera Files and Rappler have surfaced and verified many false and harmful posts but both organizations are constant targets of red-tagging and harassment. Without a policy on red-tagging, the company is inadvertently harming the organizations it contracts with. The company's partnerships with Internews and the NUJP have allowed the company to hear from local researchers and experts but the company's record of following recommendations from those deemed "Trusted Partners" is not evidenced in this report. Meta should act to strengthen this engagement and widen to a greater range of stakeholders.

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