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Digital Rights Report 2024

Foundation for Media Alternatives

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the country marked the 30th anniversary of the Philippine internet. First accessed in 1984, the internet has opened a wealth of opportunities for Filipinos to connect, learn, and access information. But three decades since, it has also shown how technology can deepen existing socio-political crises, especially in the wake of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.

With the accessibility and resources AI can offer, this digital tool has come with both advantages and disadvantages. In 2024, 84 per cent of the Filipino workforce was found to have been adopting AI tools in their work to boost productivity and efficiency. This statistic is noted to be the highest in the world as the global average only sits at 75 per cent. However, as much as Filipinos are leveraging technology to improve their work, the country saw a surge in AI-generated misinformation that targeted journalists, politicians, and other public figures.

As AI is seen to radically transform our institutions and lives, governments and organizations alike are looking into curbing the potential harms of this technology. The ubiquity of AI compelled the Philippine Supreme Court and the Central Bank of the Philippines (BSP) to draft regulatory frameworks for ethical AI use in the judiciary and financial sector, respectively. The Department of Education also eyed creating a policy on responsible AI use for the country's education system. During the 19th Congress, several bills on AI were filed, which included HB 7913, an act pushing for the establishment of a regulatory framework for AI usage.

With the rate that the country is adapting to emergent technologies, the conversations on digital rights consequently deepened, especially on the issues of privacy and cybersecurity. The recently passed Digital Services Act further underscores this shift as it intends to strengthen the country's digital economy. But this policy was also met with contention as it will hike the price of essential digital goods and services.

This edition of the Digital Rights Report 2024 covers the trends and developments in the digital rights landscape in the Philippines and the impacts of these changes in the daily lives of the Filipino public.

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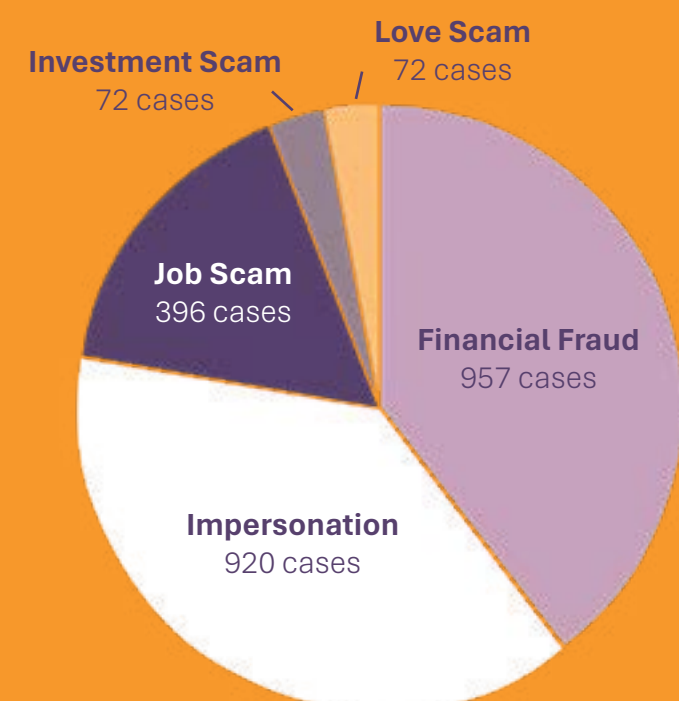
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PRIVACY

Cybersecurity issues continued hounding the country in 2024. Apart from growing cases of fraudulent texts, new forms of online scams emerged and victimized thousands of Filipinos. According to the Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center (CICC), online scams tripled in 2024, most of which were consumer fraud incidents. The CICC also noted that the online wallet Gcash was the most commonly used app by scammers to commit online shopping fraud and phishing.

MOST COMMON FORMS OF ONLINE FRAUD IN 2024



Source: Cybercrime complaints triple in 2024 – CICC, March 2025. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/03/2425442/cybercrime-complaints-triple-2024-cicc>

Amid the widespread rise in scams, various government agencies also suffered from data breaches. Notably, the data breach incident at the Department of Science and Technology compromised two terabytes of research plans, causing significant delays in approving projects and patents. News about a data breach in the Supreme Court also swirled, but the high court promptly clarified that they found no evidence for the alleged leak.

The controversy surrounding the Philippine offshore gaming operations (POGO) also compounded the existing cybercrime problem in the country. On top of the pre-registered SIM cards seized in several POGO raids, investigations also pointed to the possible connection between POGO and the string of hacking cases against government websites. Although all POGO was expected to cease operations by the end of 2024, it remains to be seen how this affects cybercrime incidents in the country.

These rising cases of online scams and data breaches urged many agencies to act and institute changes in how they respond to these incidents. For one, the Department of Migrant Workers pushed for the removal of illegal job postings on Facebook and TikTok to protect Filipinos from illegal recruitment. The BSP also released the 2024-2029 Financial Services Cyber Resilience Plan which detailed response protocols in the event of cyber fraud. According to BSP's press release, they intend to implement the plan in different phases to allow for flexibility as cyber threats continue to evolve.

The string of cybercrimes in the Philippines ultimately put into question the flawed SIM Card Registration Law once again. The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) itself recognized that the law did not foresee how bad actors could shift to other apps, such as Viber and Messenger, to carry out their operations.

The combination of poor cybersecurity infrastructure and flawed legislation has left thousands of Filipinos increasingly vulnerable to digital threats. Without timely policy intervention, the situation is likely to worsen. FMA has consistently advocated for a stronger, rights-based approach to cybersecurity and data protection. Through policy briefs, public forums, and media engagements, FMA reiterated the need for the repeal of the SIM Card Registration Law and the strict enforcement of the Data Privacy Act to better protect citizens from malicious actors.

PRESS FREEDOM

Early in 2024, CNN Philippines, the country's only predominantly English-language channel on free-to-air television, ceased operations due to financial troubles. This marked a significant loss in the local media landscape, especially as the country's largest media corporation, ABS-CBN, continues to operate without a legislative franchise. The shrinking diversity of local media sources poses a serious risk to press freedom and the public's access to reliable, independent information.



156 cases
of harassment against
media workers in 2024

As journalists struggle from the lack of media outlets, the National Union of Journalists-Philippines (NUJP) tallied 156 cases of harassment against media workers in 2024, majority of these cases are harassment and red-tagging of Filipino journalists. The NUJP emphasized the role of state forces in many of these incidents, which “harms media workers, restricts truth-telling, [and] adds to the chilling effect on the media community.” UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Irene Khan, who visited the Philippines in January 2024, shared the same sentiment and lamented the unlawful arrest of journalists such as Frenchie Mae Cumpio. “During my visit to the Philippines in January 2024 I heard many similar stories of ‘red tagging’ followed by arrest on fabricated charges for serious offences and prolonged detention to harass journalists and human rights advocates and I have conveyed my serious concerns to the government,” Khan shared.

In 2024, journalists, especially women, were often targets of deep-fakes. Clips of famous anchors such as Karen Davila and Henry Omega-Diaz were manipulated to mislead the public about a hypertension cure and a pre-election survey, respectively. A deep fake of Rappler CEO Maria Ressa endorsing the cryptocurrency Bitcoin also circulated on social media. In an investigation, Rappler linked the disinformation to a Russian scamming network committing consumer fraud. These incidents of deep-fake evidently exploit public personalities’ reputations to victimize consumers. In a time of declining public trust in the media, the emergence of deep-fakes further erodes Filipinos’ confidence in journalism and jeopardizes everyone’s access to truthful information.

Though the local media landscape appeared grim, 2024 offered bright spots for Filipino truth tellers. In July, the Supreme Court ordered the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to reinstate Rappler’s operating license, which they revoked in 2018. Rappler celebrated the decision, but for the past six years, the SEC’s ruling has profoundly affected the media outlet’s enterprise. “It’s a fact that the Duterte government used the SEC order to unleash its power to further harass us, our employees, our stakeholders, and our communities. Banks refused to do business with us. Clients shied away from advertising with us,” Rappler shared in a statement.

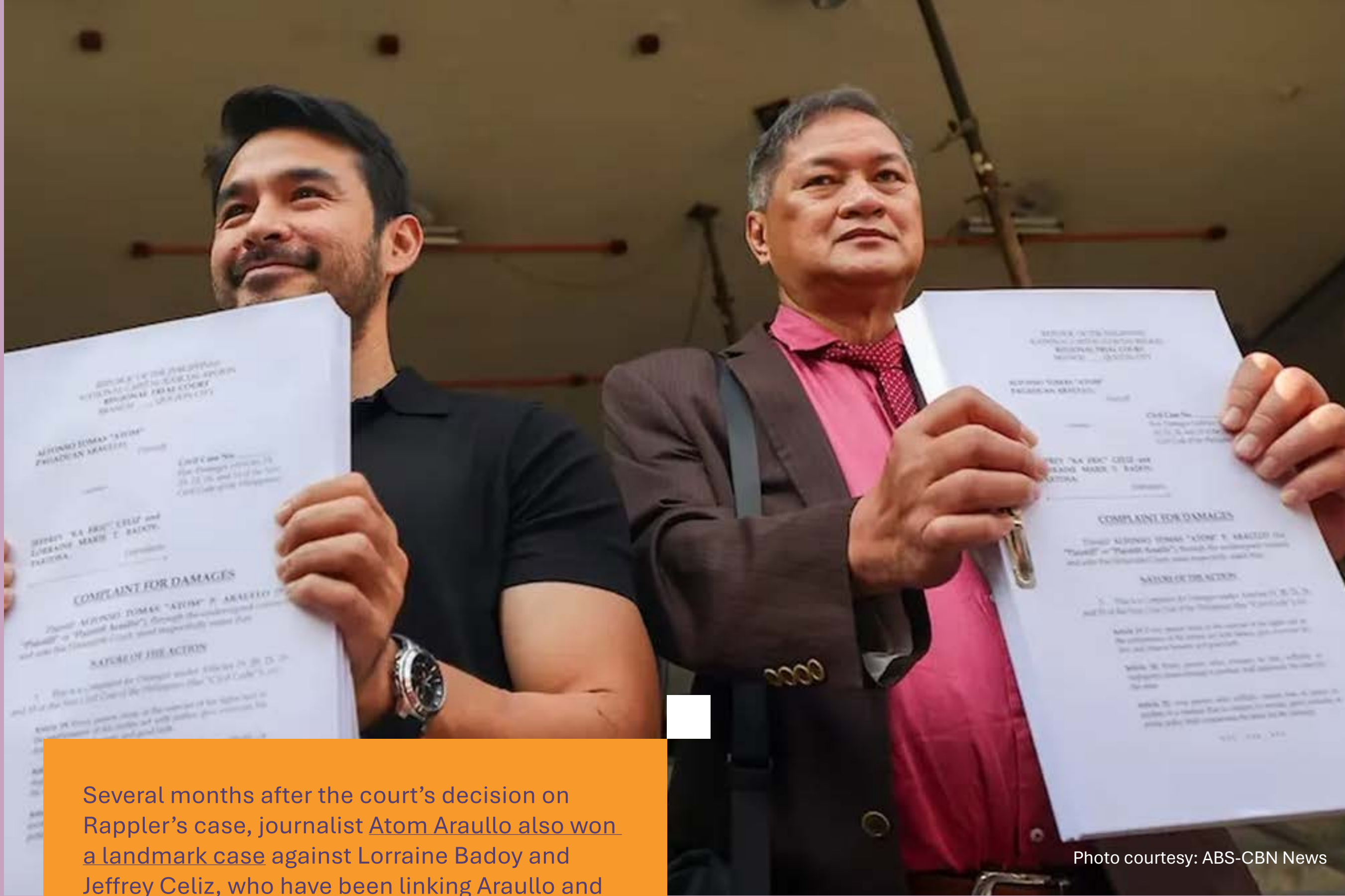


Photo courtesy: ABS-CBN News

Several months after the court's decision on Rappler's case, journalist Atom Araullo also won a landmark case against Lorraine Badoy and Jeffrey Celiz, who have been linking Araullo and his family to communist groups. While there is no existing law against red-tagging yet, the Quezon City Regional Trial Court ruled that "red-tagging, being a threat to a person's fundamental rights, is inherently malicious." Journalists and activists alike lauded the decision as red-tagging has endangered many of their colleagues. According to a 2024 NUJP study, there have been 159 red-tagging cases against journalists and newsrooms since 2016, and only 25 percent of these incidents were filed in courts. As much as Araullo's success in holding red-taggers accountable provides relief for vulnerable groups, NUJP hopes the government can offer legal remedies to support red-tagged individuals and communities, especially journalists.



Deepfakes of journalists Karen Davila and Maria Ressa

INTERNET FREEDOM

Since taking office, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (PBBM) has been boasting of his plans to digitize the country, which includes expanding internet service across islands. In 2024, PBBM approved the expansion of the country's national fiber backbone through the [Philippine Digital Infrastructure Project](#) which is expected to finish in 2028. Lawmakers also pushed for the passage of the [Konektadong Pinoy Bill](#), a legislation intended to improve and lower internet cost by encouraging internet infrastructure sharing and removing the legislative franchise requirement for internet service providers. The bill is set to be passed in June 2025.



Former FMA executive director Al Alegre launching the **Philippine Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles** on March 2024

Improving internet access for every citizen is part and parcel of modern economic development. But in the Philippines, this move towards digital inclusion must be coupled with initiatives to strengthen digital literacy. Despite being one of the most active nations on the internet, [the Philippines ranked high in digital illiteracy according to the United Nations](#). The Department of Education, under the newly-appointed Sonny Angara, vows to [incorporate digital literacy and ICT proficiencies in basic education](#).

Meanwhile, on social media platforms, fake news and hate speech continue to proliferate. With the rise of AI, spotting distorted information designed to polarize users has become trickier. Meta promised to [increase its efforts against disinformation on its platforms in June 2024](#). But a few months later later, Meta [shuttered its analytics tool CrowdTangle in August](#), which helped researchers and journalists understand social media trends, and at times, cases of disinformation.

Over on X, formerly Twitter, hate speech against minorities, especially those in conflict-stricken areas, remained rampant. Apart from boosting derogatory speech, [X has been shown to be more lenient when it comes to suspending users publishing hateful content](#). With poor content moderation on the platform, racism, misogyny and hatred reign on X which has sweeping influence on shaping public opinion.

The news of the Tiktok ban in the US over national security concerns also made headlines in 2024. While the Philippines was not affected by this development, it made Filipino legislators [reflect on regulating the popular short video app](#), especially in light of increasing tensions with China.

Taking into account the developments on social media and Philippine Internet, the FMA released the [2024 Philippine Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles](#), which looked into the impact of the Internet on the country's democracy. The document did not only forward legislative frameworks that can help build a rights-respecting online space, but called everyone's attention to the oft-neglected aspects of our digital lives such as gig workers, internet architecture, and technology's contribution to the climate crisis.

GENDER RIGHTS

Addressing tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) continued to be a major policy concern in 2024, as cases of online exploitation, harassment, and abuse remained widespread. According to the Philippine National Police, 11,636 cases of violence against women were filed to their Crime Information Reporting and Analysis System. Meanwhile, 22,421 cases of violence against children were recorded by the Department of Interior and Local Governance. Due to the nature of TFGBV, it is harder to track its occurrences and hold perpetrators into account. But more than these statistics, new forms of TFGBV have also emerged such as deep-fakes and online surrogacy in a form of online trafficking. Despite these challenges, through media sourcing, FMA mapped 23 cases of tech-facilitated gender-based violence, which included incidents of men in positions abusing their power to harass women.



11,636 cases
of violence against women in 2024

Amid the climbing cases of TFGBV, legislators once reviewed pertinent bills aiming to address these concerns. One of those bills is the Expanded Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act, which looks into protecting women and children from the various forms of violence online. The other legislation is the amendment of the Safe Spaces Act which eyes to introduce the act of grooming which manipulates and exploits minors. The same bill also aims to specifically address gender-based harassment arising from the use of AI and other emerging technologies.

Aside from passing these amendments, womens' advocacy groups are also pushing for the review of the implementation of laws such as the Anti-VAWC Act, pointing to the continuous rise of VAWC cases. The Philippine Commission on Women has started its evaluation on this legislation in 2024 to identify and address gaps in the existing version of the policy.

Meanwhile, recognizing the alarming spread of violence against children, PBBM has instituted the MAKABATA Helpline, a one-stop reporting system for violence against children, which included online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, child sexual abuse or exploitation of materials, and child trafficking. To coordinate various efforts to fight child abuse, PBBM has also created the Presidential Office for Child Protection, which will “monitor and harmonize government thrusts, policies, and programs relative to the protection of children and the promotion of their welfare.”

On the international scale, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution to study the proliferation of TFGBV and its impact on women and girls. Beyond understanding the phenomenon, the UNHRC demands that the report underscore existing best practices in mitigating TFGBV. The report will be presented to the council at its 63rd session.

Amid these developments, womens' rights groups celebrated the release of former senator Leila de Lima in June 2024. De Lima spent six years in jail for three drug-trafficking charges, which the court dismissed. A staunch Duterte critic, De Lima endured gender disinformation during the height of the investigation on her arrest. Aside from insinuations of romantic involvement with her driver, she also weathered a fake sex scandal involving her which ultimately sullied her reputation as a female lawmaker.

ELECTIONS

In the tail end of 2024, the Philippines prepared for the upcoming 2025 midterm election. With the political power concentrated on the quarreling Duterte and Marcos families for the past three years, the election opens the opportunity to elect a progressive voice in the government. But with the existing political climate, Filipinos are vigilant of electoral disruption and manipulation, especially in the wake of AI and other emergent technologies.

The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) pre-empted the campaign season by issuing AI and social media guidelines for the 2025 elections. The [Resolution No. 11064](#) aims to regulate digital political campaigning and counter disinformation on digital platforms. Among the provisions in the resolution, the COMELEC prohibited the use of AI in materials unless it came with a disclaimer. The electoral body also required electoral candidates and campaigners to register their social media accounts and pages.

While the resolution intends to combat disinformation during election season, many groups complained that some overbroad clauses may infringe basic rights. Poll watch group Kontra Daya feared that the resolution could lead to censorship. “Instead of regulation, the COMELEC should focus on educating our citizens so they can tell apart what is credible news from what is not, as well as how to use AI and other technologies responsibly,” the group said. Since it is the first time that the COMELEC implemented such a policy, it remains to be seen how this affects electoral discourses.



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