

# Paving the Neoliberal Path: Presidential Discourses on Farm-to-Market Roads in the Philippines (1946-1985)

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how farm-to-market roads (FMRs) were used by Philippine presidents from 1946 to 1985 not only as tools for agricultural modernization and rural development, but also as symbolic instruments of political legitimation and ideological expression. While commonly understood as logistical infrastructure that facilitated agricultural productivity and market access, FMRs in the postwar Philippines acquired discursive significance. They were employed to articulate visions of state-led development, economic integration, and rural uplift, while also reflecting broader transformations toward market-oriented governance.

Using critical discourse analysis, this study examines presidential speeches, national development plans, and official communications to uncover how FMRs were framed within evolving political and economic contexts. Drawing on Stephanie Lee Mudge's tripartite framework of neoliberalism, intellectual, bureaucratic, and political, the study argues that FMRs became material and rhetorical vehicles for embedding neoliberal ideals. Presidents invoked market logics to justify FMR investments, positioning infrastructure as the bridge between marginalized rural communities and national economic growth, while simultaneously reinforcing technocratic governance and state power.

Methodologically, the study combines qualitative document analysis with semi-structured expert interviews, including insights from development practitioners and scholars. It analyzes twenty national development plans and key policy texts produced between 1946 and 1985. The findings suggest that FMRs were discursively constructed to naturalize market-based reforms, often portraying infrastructure as politically neutral while advancing elite interests and Cold War-aligned development paradigms.

This research contributes to critical historiographies of development, infrastructure, and state formation in Southeast Asia by reinterpreting FMRs as ideologically charged spaces. Rather than treating roads as neutral public goods, the study positions them as symbolic and strategic elements in the consolidation of postcolonial governance. It highlights how

FMRs helped articulate and institutionalize neoliberal values in the Philippines, turning roads into pathways not just for goods and people, but for the circulation of political ideas, developmental promises, and state legitimacy.

**Keywords:** *farm-to-market road, agricultural development, ideology, symbolism, critical discourse analysis*

## Introduction

**F**arm-to-market roads (FMRs) have been strategically utilized by Philippine presidents as both a transformative tool for agricultural modernization, rural development, and political legitimation since postwar period. While FMRs were presented as practical solution to underdevelopment in rural areas, they also functioned symbolically, as visible manifestations of state presence and as vehicles for broader ideological agenda. From the early years of independence through the authoritarian consolidation of the Marcos regime, FMRs became integral to the state's vision of agrarian transformation, often involved as evidence of progress, equity, and national integration.

Globally, it has been linked to substantial increases in productivity, employment, and income, with estimates suggesting a 10 percent improvement in these areas.<sup>1</sup> Studies have suggested that improved access to markets, lower input costs, and reduced travel time contribute significantly to rural economic growth.<sup>2</sup> In the Philippines, research by Callanta and Moreno (2024)<sup>3</sup> demonstrates that FMR initiatives have significantly advanced rural development. Specifically, they report a 25% increase in agricultural productivity due to improved access, which ensures timely delivery of inputs and better market reach. Furthermore, market access has risen by 30%, contributing to the local economy by reducing transportation costs and expanding trade opportunities. These improvements have also led to a 20% increase in household incomes, underscoring the economic benefits of reduced travel expenses and enhanced market access, ultimately improving the overall wellbeing of rural communities.

<sup>1</sup> Shahidur R. Khandker and Gayatri B. Koolwal, *Estimating the Long-Term Impacts of Rural Roads: A Dynamic Panel Approach*, Policy Research Working Paper No. 5867 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/208521468326364832>

<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo Casaburi, Rachel Glennerster, and Tavneet Suri, "Rural Roads and Intermediated Trade: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Sierra Leone," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2161643>.

<sup>3</sup> Daphney Shane Callanta and Frede Moreno, *The Socioeconomic Implications of Farm-to-Market Road Infrastructure on Rural Development in Zamboanga Sibugay Province, Philippines: An Analysis of Policy and Community Outcomes* (Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines: Department of Agriculture – Philippine Rural Development Project; Pasig City: International Technology Management Corp. [INTEM], n.d.).

Moreover, high-quality FMR projects are shown to be more effective in reducing poverty compared to investments in the larger national road network.<sup>4</sup> These efforts resonate with the rural development strategies of Koch and Movenzadeh (1979),<sup>5</sup> emphasizing infrastructure development to boost productivity and income among smallholders. Therefore, addressing the needs of rural populations through improved distributional infrastructure remains crucial for equitable development.

Yes, while economic analyses of FMRs tend to focus on outcomes and efficiencies, this study thus seeks to illuminate the multifaceted role of FMRs in shaping not only rural infrastructure but also the political and ideological landscape of post-colonial Philippines. By exploring how FMR interventions were framed as integral to neoliberal economic models, it specifically analyzes how FMRs were represented in presidential rhetoric between 1946 and 1985. It contributes to a broader understanding of how political leaders used infrastructure as a means of securing their political legitimacy, advancing developmental goals, and promoting market-driven policies.

Through critical discourse analysis of presidential speeches, development plans and official communications, this study argues that FMRs were not merely infrastructural assets but also essential tools for social and economic transformation. They were used to articulate visions of self-reliant, market-integrated stakeholders while simultaneously legitimizing technocratic governance and foreign-assisted development. By analyzing the historical deployment of FMRs in the postwar Philippines, this study contributes to broader historiographies of infrastructure, development and neoliberal transformation in Southeast Asia.

## Research Objectives

This study aims to provide a historically grounded and critically informed analysis of the sociopolitical significance of FMRs in the Philippines from 1946 to 1985. While existing literature often emphasizes the economic and logistical benefits of FMRs, their role as instruments of political strategy and ideological expression remains underexplored in historical scholarship. This study addresses that gap by examining how postwar Philippine presidents

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<sup>4</sup> Gilberto M. Llanto, "Investing in Local Roads for Economic Growth" (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2011), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1138.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Janet A. Koch and Fred Moavenzadeh, "A Methodology for Evaluating Rural Roads in the Context of Development in Low Volume Roads" (paper presented at the International Conference on Low Volume Roads, Washington, DC, August 20–23, 1979), <https://trid.trb.org/view/145635>.

framed FMR projects not only as a response to rural underdevelopment but also as a means of legitimizing their administrations and articulating their economic ideologies. Drawing on Mudge's tripartite conceptualization of neoliberalism, the study explores how FMRs became discursive and material vehicles for promoting market-oriented development, aligning state-led FMR projects with global shifts toward neoliberal governance. By integrating political history, development theory, neoliberal discourse, and discourse analysis, this study reframes FMRs as key sites where infrastructure power, and ideology intersected, contributing to a deeper understanding of how the Philippine presidents constructed legitimacy and mobilized rural development as part of the broader postcolonial and Cold War political strategies.

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that interrogates the intersection of infrastructure, political economy, and discourse in postcolonial Southeast Asia. Scholars such as Vicente Rafael (*Contracting Colonialism*, 1992)<sup>6</sup> and Benedict Anderson (*Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 1990)<sup>7</sup> have emphasized how state discourse creates legitimacy, a framework crucial for understanding presidential narratives around FMRs. Moreover, scholars such as Anna Tsing (*Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, 2005)<sup>8</sup> and James Ferguson (*The Anti Politics Machine*, 1994)<sup>9</sup> have problematized the technocratic and depoliticized language of development, showing how infrastructure projects become embedded in the global and local political economies. In the Philippines, studies by Walden Bello (*Development, Debacle*, 1992),<sup>10</sup> Temario Rivera (*Landlords and Capitalists*, 1994),<sup>11</sup> and more contemporary analyses by Nicole Curato and Filomeno Aguilar Jr offer critical insight into how development initiatives often serve elite interests under the guise of poverty alleviation. This study adds to this discourse by focusing on FMRs as ideologically charged spaces where Philippine presidents from Roxas to

<sup>6</sup> Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*, 1st ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/70762>.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv3s8n2s>.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7s1xk>.

<sup>9</sup> James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Walden F. Bello, David Kinley, and Elaine Elinson, *Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines* (San Francisco, CA; [Oakland, CA]: Institute for Food and Development Policy, Philippine Solidarity Network, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Temario C. Rivera, *Landlords and Capitalists: Class, Family, and State in Philippine Manufacturing* (1994), accessed April 16, 2025, [https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/faculty\\_research/8636](https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/faculty_research/8636).

Marcos constructed neoliberal visions of modernization. Rather than treating FMRs as neutral development tools, this analysis draws on critical discourse analysis to examine how they were symbolically developed to naturalize market-based agricultural policies, legitimize political authority and consolidate state power.

## Research Scope

This study focuses on four Philippine presidents spanning the years 1946 to 1985, employing critical discourse analysis to examine the rationale and narratives behind their FMR initiatives. Drawing from a wide range of primary and secondary sources including development and investment plans, state of the nation addresses, official statements, newspaper reports, and scholarly literature, the study treats these materials as both policy documentation and ideological texts. It aims to uncover how FMR projects were framed in relations to national development, rural modernization, and state legitimacy during a pivotal area in the Philippine postwar history.

## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative, mixed-methods approach, with primary emphasis on document analysis and expert interviews. Central to the research are the twenty Philippine development plans spanning 1946-1985, sourced from the Republic of the Philippines' Ministry of Planning (Department of Economy Planning and Development (DepDev)). These plans were systematically examined using broad search terms such as roads, road network, agriculture, FMRs, development, agricultural development, and infrastructure development to ensure a comprehensive retrieval of relevant discourses surrounding FMR projects.

The analysis interrogates how development ideologies articulated by successive political administration influenced infrastructure planning, particularly in the rural sector. The discourse analysis highlights how these state narratives reflect broader visions of national progress, rural transformation and governance.

In addition, the study incorporates data from online semi-structured interviews conducted between June and December 2021 with participants comprising academic scholars and representatives from non- government organizations (NGOs). Participants were selected based on their subject-matter expertise, professional background, and availability. These interviews sought to deepen the understanding of policy rationales behind FMR project initiatives across different economic regimes.



It must be noted that systematically compiled datasets disaggregating FMR projects by presidential administration are not available. Existing government records provide only partial infrastructure data that do not isolate FMR allocations. Consequently, this study does not attempt a quantitative comparison of FMR project concentrations across administrations. Instead, it focuses on analyzing how the economic policies and development ideologies of each administration shaped the design, financing, and prioritization of FMR initiatives.

By integrating documentary analysis with expert insight, the study situates FMR programs within the broader framework of neoliberal governmentality and state-building in postwar Philippines.

### Theoretical Concepts and Research Frameworks

The emergence and consolidation of neoliberalism in the Philippines is deeply intertwined with the political transitions from post-colonial governance to a market-oriented economic model. While neoliberalism is often associated with global economic trends of the late twentieth century, its influence in the Philippines emerged earlier, shaped by the country's efforts to rebuild after World War II, manage rural poverty, and secure political legitimacy amid shifting Cold War geopolitics. In this context, development initiatives, particularly infrastructure projects, such as FMRs became crucial instruments through which the state articulated its vision of progress and modernization. Neoliberalism, characterized by market-driven solutions and the belief that markets are central to achieving freedom across various life domains,<sup>12</sup> has had a profound effect on public policies in developing nations like the Philippines.

The study adopts Stephanie Lee Mudge's tripartite framework of neoliberalism, which delineates the ideology into three facets: intellectual, bureaucratic, and political.<sup>13</sup> The intellectual facet underscores the market as the primary source and arbiter of rights, value, rewards, and freedom. The bureaucratic facet refers to the institutionalization of market-oriented reforms such as liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and monetarism, aimed at fostering market competition. Lastly, the political facet reflects the framing of governance and public policy around the ideal of market

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<sup>12</sup> Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy, "Moral Views of Market Society," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (August 1, 2007): 285–311, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131642>.

<sup>13</sup> Stephanie L. Mudge, "What Is Neo-Liberalism?," *Socio-Economic Review* 6, no. 4 (May 21, 2008): 703–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwn016>.

rationality and advocates for market-centric politics. This approach allows for a historically sensitive reading of neoliberalism as not merely an economic doctrine, but as an ideological project embedded in discourse, policy and practice.

By applying Mudge's framework to the Philippine case, this study examines how presidents from 1946 to 1985 used the language and logic of infrastructure, specifically FMRs to promote goals of agricultural development, rural uplift, and economic integration. These FMRs, often promoted as technical solutions to poverty and productivity, also carried symbolic weight. They embodied state claims to develop competence, while also advancing market-oriented ideologies under the guise of modernization. In tracing these discursive and policy shifts, the study situates FMRs within the larger ideological transformation of the Philippine developmental state, contributing to broader historiographies of infrastructure, state formation and economic thought in Southeast Asia.

## Data Analysis

Political leaders construct narratives that frame their FMR initiatives as demonstrations of state power, aimed at garnering and maintaining public support and consolidating political authority while advancing neoliberal ideologies. As Crawford (2000) points out, politicians evoke emotions and passions in their policy initiatives.<sup>14</sup> This study examines how Philippine leaders from 1946 to 1985 promoted their neoliberal ideology through FMR interventions, presenting them as symbols of political capital and development necessity. By scrutinizing these narratives and the underlying neoliberal philosophies, this study seeks to reveal how FMRs served as vehicles for political legitimization and ideological propagation, shaping rural development policies and governance practices in the Philippines during the mid-20th century.

## Manuel Roxas (1946 - 1948)

President Manuel A. Roxas earned the moniker 'nation-builder' for his pivotal role in orchestrating the first Philippine Master Economic Plan, which steered the nation towards recovery and growth following the devastation of World War II. Under his leadership, the Philippines

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<sup>14</sup> Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (April 2000): 116–56, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560327>.

implemented the Thomas Hibben Plan (1947-1952),<sup>15</sup> marking the country's inaugural official development strategy. The plan introduced categorizations such as 'first, second, and third-class roads' to prioritize infrastructure development. Roxas directed the national government to oversee first and second-class roads, while local authorities managed third-class roads, often referred to as minor roads. This delineation underscored the hierarchical approach to infrastructure reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts across the country's war-torn landscape, geared towards maximizing efficiency in resource allocation and administration.

Roxas highlighted the dire state of Philippine roads in his State of the Nation Address, noting their significant disrepair and emphasizing the urgent need for restoration. Leveraging American assistance, particularly through the US Public Roads Administration, he allocated resources based on economic and military considerations. This strategic allocation aimed to prioritize roads crucial for both civilian economic activities and military logistics, crucially aiding post-war reconstruction efforts. In his 1947 State of the Nation Address:

I have recommended that these allocations be made available to all the provinces and cities in proportion to their first, second, and third-class roads and with due consideration to its economic (and military) importance.<sup>16</sup>

His tenure underscored the foundational role of infrastructure development in rebuilding a nation ravaged by war. His administration's systematic approach to FMR rehabilitation laid the groundwork for subsequent agricultural and economic advancements, marking a critical chapter in Philippine agricultural development history.

He leveraged American-sponsored funding, particularly through the Philippine Trade Act (Bell Trade Act) and the Philippine Rehabilitation Act (Tydings War Damage Act), to implement a robust rehabilitation program aimed at rebuilding the Philippines post-World War II. These initiatives were pivotal in stimulating national and regional road development, although specific figures detailing these infrastructure investments are not provided. The Philippine Trade Act and other agreements, including export quotas and parity amendments, facilitated favorable conditions for American businesses to operate in the Philippines. This environment encouraged

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hibben, *"Philippine Economic Development: A Technical Memorandum"* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1947), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o2fSefJJ-Ty9vwhllzinept15Xvlg1sx/view>.

<sup>16</sup> Manuel Roxas, "Second State of the Nation Address," *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, January 27, 1947, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1947/01/27/manuel-roxas-second-state-of-the-nation-address-january-27-1947/>.



increased investments in infrastructure, particularly roads, to support the expanding domestic agricultural sector and meet the logistical needs of American enterprises. He strategically framed his development projects, particularly FMR construction, not simply as logistical necessity, but as a cornerstone of national revival and integral to industrial policy and economic growth. He used political rhetoric, employing metaphors of prosperity and images of heroic improvement, to garner public support for his administration's initiatives. His speeches were rich with metaphors of prosperity, resilience, and progress, positioning FMR as symbols of economic promise and national pride. For instance, in his 1948 address, he declared: "Our program of rehabilitation is far advanced. Conditions among our people have been ameliorated. There is relative prosperity in our land",<sup>17</sup> Such rhetoric aimed to convey optimism and rally national unity behind his vision for economic recovery and agricultural development by capitalizing on American support and favorable economic conditions to drive extensive road investments as a cornerstone of post-war reconstruction and pursuing economic revitalization efforts in the Philippines.

He emphasized the critical importance of continuous reconstruction and development efforts in post-World War II Philippines, highlighting that any setback would negatively impact the people. His administration allocated more than twenty percent of the national income towards rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development, exceeding conventional percentages. Roxas expanded these initiatives and sought ongoing assistance from the United States, as evidenced by his statement that the Philippine Ambassador to the US would pursue favorable actions on various requests in Washington, including loans for economic reconstruction and industrial development.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, he advocated for the creation of a Central Bank to finance infrastructure projects such as roads, aimed at bolstering agriculture and industry to accelerate economic growth. He positioned roads as integral to industrial policy and painted them as essential for achieving economic prosperity and agricultural development. Through political rhetoric infused with metaphors, Roxas aimed to persuade citizens of the socio-economic value of FMRs, portraying them as key to a brighter future for the nation. His FMR projects were therefore aligned with the goal of quickly restoring access from plantations and production areas to ports, facilitating the revival of agricultural exports. His economic policies also reflected and reinforced

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<sup>17</sup>Manuel Roxas, "1948 State of the Nation Address. Last SONA of President Manuel Roxas, Lepanto Street, Manila," *Inquirer.net*, January 26, 1948, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1947/01/27/manuel-roxas-second-state-of-the-nation-address-january-27-1947/>.

<sup>18</sup> Roxas.

emerging neoliberal ideologies. Through the promotion of FMRs and related infrastructure, he advanced a vision of development centered on market integration, export-oriented agriculture and public-private cooperation. The Philippine Trade Act and its associated parity provisions opened the economy to American investments and created favorable conditions for foreign capital, particularly in the agricultural and industrial sectors. FMR was central to his vision, facilitating the movement of goods and labor and supporting the logistical demands of both domestic and foreign enterprises. His administration rebuilt the war-torn economy through heavy reliance on U.S. grants and loans under the Philippine Trade Act and the Philippine Rehabilitation Act, which fixed the peso-dollar exchange rate and reinforced trade dependence on the United States. Infrastructure aid prioritized roads that restored export capacity for cash crops, laying the groundwork for later rural road networks that served global trade needs. His economic framework was shaped by the Bell Trade Act and the Parity Rights Amendment, which tied the Philippine economy closely to US markets and investors.

However, despite these efforts, significant challenges persisted in the agricultural sector. While these roads benefited large landowners and agro-export companies, they did little to restructure rural economies or address tenant farmers' needs, as land reform was not a central policy thrust in his economic program. Farmers continued to face insufficient income to sustain a decent standard of living. Issues such as primitive farming methods, widespread poverty among farmers, and inadequate facilities or limited access to low-interest credit remained unresolved. Additionally, small-scale farmer beneficiaries often faced pressure to sell their lands back to landowners due to inadequate support services from government programs, which prioritized FMR infrastructure over crucial agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and machinery services.

Tragically, his presidency was cut short by his sudden death in 1948, before completing half of his term. Nonetheless, the policies and discourses he initiated—particularly the strategic use of infrastructure as both economic tool and political symbol—endured well beyond his term. Successive administrations continued to leverage FMRs as emblems of development and state capacity, illustrating the legacy of Roxas's developmental paradigm.

His tenure underscores the complexities and challenges of balancing infrastructure development with comprehensive agricultural support in post-war Philippines. His administration's systematic approach to road development, bolstered by American aid and neoliberal economic alignments, laid the foundation for postwar agricultural and industrial transformation. Yet, it also revealed the limitations of infrastructure when divorced from

broad agrarian reform and rural support mechanisms, issues that would continue to haunt Philippine development in the decades to follow.

### Elpidio Quirino (1948-1953)

The passing of President Manuel Roxas in 1948 resulted in Vice President and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Elpidio Quirino into the presidency. Quirino's economic policy was anchored in the Five-Year Program of Rehabilitation and Industrial Development (1949-1953), known as the Cuaderno Plan, which sought to achieve import-substitution industrialization while expanding export capacity in high-value agricultural, forestry, and mineral products.<sup>19</sup> This plan prioritized domestic industrialization by establishing industrial plants strategically across the country. FMR projects were designed to complement this industrial push by linking agricultural, mining, and timber production zones directly to processing centers and ports, aligning infrastructure with the plan's emphasis on export-oriented and resource-based industries. His administration openly advocated FMRs as vital arteries that could enhance commercial agriculture and invigorate rural economies and essential for enhancing commercial prospects in agriculture. He justified seeking loans from international institutions like the World Bank to fund short-term FMR construction projects. In his addresses, Quirino underscored the importance of expanding road networks in rural areas, stating:

We have continued to give impetus to the rehabilitation and reconstruction...during the last year, added 1,370 kilometers of new roads to our highway system, 34 concrete and steel permanent bridges.<sup>20</sup>

Here, infrastructure policy was inseparable from his broader economic vision: roads were to serve as enablers of industrial diversification while also sustaining foreign exchange earnings through agricultural exports.

The development programs under Quirino prioritized road construction in rural areas, where improved infrastructure was seen as crucial for accessing plantations, timberlands, and mining areas. His administration subscribed to the belief that enhanced transportation infrastructure drove economic growth by facilitating the export of products such as abaca and

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<sup>19</sup> National Economic Council (NEC), *"The Cuaderno Plan: Five-Year Program of Rehabilitation and Industrial Development, 1949-1953."* (Manila: National Economic Council, n.d.), accessed January 2, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Elpidio Quirino, "Second State of the Nation Address," *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, January 23, 1950, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1950/01/23/elpidio-quirino-second-state-of-the-nation-address-january-23-1950/>.

higher-grade lumber, among other strategic agricultural materials. He emphasized the integral role of FMRs in supporting industrial development and economic growth in post-war Philippines. His strategic approach to infrastructure development aimed to foster a more robust and diversified economy, laying the groundwork for continued economic expansion in subsequent years.

Moreover, Quirino's use of foreign assistance demonstrates the interplay between economic policy and infrastructure development. In the southern Philippines where a 235-kilometer FMR opened up extensive agricultural, forest, and mineral lands to private investors, a move consistent with his policy goal of integrating rural resources into national and international markets. Under Quirino's Cuaderno Plan (1949-1953), the Philippine Commission allocated forty-one percent of the public works budget to road improvements aimed at expanding agricultural production. Quirino emphasized the urgency of road construction in fostering agricultural and industrial growth, stating, "the construction of a network of roads ... must be accelerated to give impetus to this fertile region's agricultural and industrial development."<sup>21</sup> This shows the aid continued to fund rural road rehabilitation and feeder systems, linking agricultural zones to ports and urban markets. While justified as economic recovery, these projects deepened dependence on foreign markets for agricultural sales, echoing Roxas's export-led recovery model.

He framed his road development program as indispensable for future development initiatives, highlighting its completion as a critical milestone despite financial constraints. He described ongoing efforts to maintain and expand the highway system, including the development of a near 29,000-kilometer road network in the Cagayan Valley exemplified his vision of nationwide connectivity, to wit:

We have exerted every effort this past year to maintain and add to our system of highways and bridges and of other means of communications. Nearly 29,000 kilometers of roads [...] will provide the Cagayan Valley with a continuous road.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from framing his road development program as a manifestation of development, he also ascribed in the rhetoric that it is necessary to achieve agricultural and industrial development. He believed that roads are

<sup>21</sup> Elpidio Quirino, "Third State of the Nation Address," *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, January 22, 1951, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1951/01/22/elpidio-quirino-third-state-of-the-nation-address-january-22-1951/>.

<sup>22</sup> Elpidio Quirino, "Fifth State of the Nation Address," *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, January 26, 1953, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1953/01/26/elpidio-quirino-fifth-state-of-the-nation-address-january-26-1953/>.

inevitable and imperative in economic growth as it would help businesses create jobs in the agricultural and industrial sectors. He framed the FMR program as both a pragmatic economic necessity and a symbol of post-war recovery. Roads were not merely conduits for commerce; they were instruments of nation-building. He envisioned infrastructure development as essential to job creation in agriculture and industry, a perspective deeply informed by the socio-economic challenges of the era.

However, his administration faced significant challenges. Social interventions, such as agrarian reforms aimed at reducing farm tenancy and alleviating farmers' debt, struggled to gain traction within the Liberal Party, which comprised professional politicians with commercial and landed interests.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, despite substantial investments in FMRs, limitations in post-war resources, ineffective measures against corruption, and failures to address issues like starvation and inflation undermined agricultural productivity. Problems such as locust and rat infestations further compounded difficulties for farmers, rendering crops useless.<sup>24</sup>

Looking ahead, understanding how Quirino's successor framed and articulated the value of FMRs as a national symbol will be crucial. Analyzing successor administrations' narratives on road development can shed light on continuity or divergence in developmental priorities and strategies, particularly in fostering a sense of community and patriotism among citizens in supporting infrastructure projects like FMRs.

Nonetheless, his road development program signaled a pivotal shift in post-war governance: it institutionalized infrastructure as a developmental imperative. His administration established a model wherein state-led investment in transportation was positioned not only as a logistical necessity but also as a national symbol of progress. His economic policy molded his FMR program into a vehicle for accelerating industrialization and export expansion, financed through a combination of public resources and foreign loans.

During Elpidio Quirino's administration (1948–1953), the Hukbalahap insurgency created pressure for the state to expand rural development initiatives. In response, the government sought to enhance its presence in the countryside through infrastructure projects, including FMRs, and by

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<sup>23</sup> Robert P. Stephens, "The Prospect for Social Progress in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 23, no. 2 (June 1950): 139, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2753592>.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis Merrill, "Shaping Third World Development: U.S. Foreign Aid and Supervision in the Philippines, 1948–1953," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, no. 2 (1993): 137–59, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656193X00022>



providing rebels with a pathway out of poverty via land redistribution.<sup>25</sup> Although the Economic Development Corporation (EDCOR) program ultimately resettled fewer than 1,000 families with government support, the propaganda surrounding these rehabilitation efforts helped weaken the Hukbalahap's mass base.<sup>26</sup> FMR construction during this period was therefore not only aimed at improving agricultural productivity and connectivity but also served as a strategic tool to consolidate state authority and diminish insurgent influence in rural areas.

As the country transitioned into the next administration, a key historical question arises: how did Quirino's successors frame the value of FMRs? Exploring their rhetoric and policy choices provides deeper insight into whether infrastructure development remained a continuity of statecraft or diverged into new symbolic and strategic meanings. Tracing these evolving narratives will illuminate the role of infrastructure in shaping citizenship, patriotism, and the broader project of national development.

### **Ramon Magsaysay (1953-1957)**

President Ramon Magsaysay (1953-1957) was acutely aware of the challenges facing the agricultural sector in the Philippines. His economic policy was anchored on the Five-Year Economic Development Program (1955-1959), which prioritized inclusive regional and rural community development to strengthen the national economy and ensure political stability.<sup>27</sup> Central to his agenda was the intensification of essential infrastructure services, with a particular emphasis on the development of FMRs. By linking his infrastructure plan to a national economic strategy, Magsaysay aimed to modernize agriculture, stimulate rural productivity, and integrate rural producers into both domestic and export markets.

His administration introduced a regional development plan that delineated terms such as feeder roads and barangay roads as integral components of national economic planning, underscoring the importance of FMRs in rural development. These roads were integral to his broader Highway Fund program, which aimed to enhance connectivity and facilitate economic

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<sup>25</sup> Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 2005), 176-177.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Quezon City: KEN Incorporated, 1987), 116.

<sup>27</sup> National Economic Council, *The Five-Year Economic Development Program for FY 1955-1959 (Condensed Report)* (Manila: National Economic Council, 1954), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MWDjIHxA1hgrpGr7ioRqoESb2bzBm\\_Sy/view?usp=drive\\_open](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MWDjIHxA1hgrpGr7ioRqoESb2bzBm_Sy/view?usp=drive_open).

activities in rural areas. The economic rationale was clear, efficient transport networks were essential to lowering transaction costs, expanding market access, and boosting agricultural competitiveness, all consistent with the IMF and US-backed vision of export-oriented modernization. His approach aimed to improve agricultural productivity by ensuring that produce from rural areas could reach markets efficiently, to wit:

I am for the adoption of a public works program that will bring the benefits of democracy to the nipa huts of the poor. All too often, our small farmers have to carry their products to market on their backs because we have neglected barrio roads. These, in turn, would not be fully effective unless they feed a system of national highways. We would aim to make them consist principally of concrete pavements financed through public borrowing, to be serviced from the Highway Fund.<sup>28</sup>

He viewed FMRs not just as physical infrastructure but as catalysts for economic growth and social development. FMRs were constructed to integrate rural producers into national and export markets, reflecting IMF and US priorities of economic modernization tied to political stability.

His policies sought to address the specific needs of rural communities, recognizing the pivotal role of agriculture in the Philippine economy. Under his tenure, rural development was pursued through a combination of public works, technical assistance, and social investment. In a marked shift from previous administrations, he viewed FMR development as a national imperative, advocating for policies that empowered rural communities, reduced poverty, and advanced market-oriented agricultural production.

Furthermore, his administration implemented measures to support small-scale farmers, including providing access to agricultural inputs and technical assistance. His emphasis on rural development through FMRs marked a departure from previous administrations, highlighting a proactive approach to addressing the socio-economic challenges in rural Philippines. He repeatedly defined FMR as a symbol of development as he pushed for road facilities under his Highway and Feeder Road Program to connect and improve the agriculture, forest, and mining sectors. In 1955, he reported the construction of 430 kilometers of feeder roads across 80 communities. These projects, including a 235-kilometer road system in Mindanao, aimed to unlock vast tracts of agricultural, forest, and mineral lands. His efforts extended to the improvement of interprovincial networks, with 385 kilometers of concrete paving, 182 kilometers of asphalt roads, and 29 new

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<sup>28</sup> Ramon Magsaysay, *First State of the Nation Address*, 1954, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1954/01/25/ramon-magsaysay-first-state-of-the-nation-address-january-25-1954/>.

permanent bridges. These accomplishments reflected his integrated vision of connectivity, productivity, and regional equity.

...road facilities are essential in improving the farmer's lot. This brings us to the administration's highway and feeder road program. We have constructed about 430 kilometers of feeder roads during the past year serving about 80 communities and opening new areas. In Mindanao, we have started the construction of 235 kilometers of roads, which, when completed, will open large areas of agricultural, forests, and mineral lands, and connect the coastal with the inland towns... In addition, the improvement of the interprovincial network was started on 90 projects covering 385 kilometers of concrete paving and 182 kilometers of asphalt, and 29 permanent bridges...<sup>29</sup>

His tenure was characterized by a strong commitment to rural and agricultural development, exemplified by his strategic emphasis on FMRs as essential infrastructure. His policies laid the groundwork for enhanced connectivity and economic empowerment in rural areas, contributing significantly to the Philippines' socio-economic landscape during the mid-20th century. To bolster his vision of FMRs as symbols of transformative development towards a prosperous future, Magsaysay secured substantial Official Development Assistance (ODA), including aid from the Philippine Council for US Aid A-Foreign Operations Administration program, which sustained 3,950-kilometer road network.<sup>30</sup> Under his Rodriguez Plan (1956-1960), his administration undertook ambitious public works and permanent improvement programs.<sup>31</sup> These initiatives included the construction of 83 bridge projects, a 260-kilometer main road in Mindanao, and an extensive network comprising 3,000 kilometers of FMRs, alongside 2,200 kilometers of provincial and city roads. These efforts underscored Magsaysay's proactive approach to infrastructure development, aimed at facilitating agricultural productivity, enhancing transportation efficiency, and fostering regional development across the Philippines. These investments aligned with his economic policy of integrating rural economies into the national growth framework, emphasizing infrastructure as a prerequisite for productivity.

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<sup>29</sup> Ramon Ramon Magsaysay, *Inaugural Address of President Magsaysay, December 30, 1953*, in *Historical Papers and Documents, Book 7, vol. 3: Addresses and Speeches (1953-1957)*, [https://archive.org/stream/MOP-Vol3-Ramon-Magsaysay/5HD%20-%20RM\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/MOP-Vol3-Ramon-Magsaysay/5HD%20-%20RM_djvu.txt)

<sup>30</sup> Nick Cullather, "America's Boy? Ramon Magsaysay and the Illusion of Influence," *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 3 (August 1, 1993): 305-38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3640933>.

<sup>31</sup> National Economic Council, *Rodriguez Plan: The Five-Year Economic Development Program, 1956-1960* (Manila: National Economic Council, n.d.), accessed January 2, 2022.

President Ramon Magsaysay's presidency during the 1950s was not only a period of combating communist insurgency but also a time of nation-building and fostering national identity in the Philippines. His approach to FMRs went beyond mere infrastructure development; he used FMRs as a national symbol of nationalism, community, and patriotism. He portrayed FMRs as a vehicle for disseminating his ideas of nationhood and urged rural communities to participate actively in their construction. He emphasized self-help and community effort, asserting that the government alone could not solve all problems. This approach aimed to unify rural communities in the spirit of patriotism and nation-building, encouraging them to contribute creatively to improving their villages and livelihoods. In his own words, he proposed concentrating efforts on feeder roads to reach isolated barrios, suggesting legislation for constructing feeder roads on a self-help basis where the government would provide funds, expertise, equipment, and local materials that underscored his belief in empowering local communities and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility in rural development, to wit:

We propose to concentrate our work primarily on feeder roads to reach our long-isolated barrios. Considering our lack of funds and the enthusiasm of our rural people, I would suggest that Congress approve the necessary legislation authorizing the construction of feeder roads on a self-help basis. The government shall provide the funds, know-how and equipment, people, labor, and locally available materials.<sup>32</sup>

This policy reduced government expenditure per project while maximizing community buy-in, directly reflecting his belief in shared responsibility for national development.

Despite his efforts, Magsaysay faced challenges from the Philippine Congress, which hesitated to pass legislation, such as comprehensive land reform, that could potentially threaten their vested interests in landownership (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Presidential Policy in the Philippines; Magsaysay's Record, 1956).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, agricultural challenges persisted under his administration, including low land productivity, widespread land tenancy, capital shortages, and inadequate educational opportunities for farmers. Despite his inclination to a market-oriented FMR infrastructure, farmers still experienced challenges. For instance, the productivity of the land was low, with half of the farmers

<sup>32</sup> Ramon Magsaysay, *Inaugural Address of President Magsaysay, December 30, 1953*, in *Historical Papers and Documents*, Book 7, vol. 3: *Addresses and Speeches (1953–1957)*, [https://archive.org/stream/MOP-Vol3-Ramon-Magsaysay/5HD%20-%20RM\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/MOP-Vol3-Ramon-Magsaysay/5HD%20-%20RM_djvu.txt)

<sup>33</sup> R. H. F., "Presidential Policy in the Philippines: Magsaysay's Record," *The World Today* 12, no. 12 (1956): 512–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40392875>.

being tenants. The shortage of capital was severe, and creditors often charged excessive interest rates. In addition, the farms were too small, with half of the cultivators having less than two hectares of land. Partial farm employment was widespread with farm families, averaging six people, receiving less than 600 pesos (PhP 2= \$1), while the average head of a farm family had only a few formal schooling years. Although he missed improving the overall farmers' situation, he accomplished more than other administrations before him.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, his administration achieved significant milestones in rural development and infrastructure, surpassing previous administrations in its approach to market-oriented FMR interventions and agricultural support services. His untimely death in an airplane crash cut short his initiatives, leaving agricultural support facilities for small farmers in limbo. His successor maintained FMRs as symbols of economic development and modernization but did not pursue aggressive FMR projects as vigorously as he had envisioned.

President Ramon Magsaysay's legacy lies in his visionary leadership in using FMRs not only as infrastructure but also to foster national unity, community empowerment, and rural development. His administration's emphasis on self-help and community involvement laid a foundation for future agricultural and rural development strategies in the Philippines. His successor did not push for aggressive FMR projects but continued to embrace FMR as a symbol of economic development and modernity narratives.

Under Ramon Magsaysay (1953–1957), who prioritized counterinsurgency, road-building and rural infrastructure, particularly FMRs, became central to his “hearts and minds” campaign. These roads facilitated the delivery of government services, enabled military access to remote barangays, and strengthened state presence in the countryside. A few months into the Magsaysay presidency, in May 1954, Luis Taruc, the supreme commander of the Hukbalahap, surrendered, practically ending the HMB-led civil war. The strategic use of FMRs and rural infrastructure contributed to the decline of insurgent influence. With the death of the Hukbalahap rebellion came the collapse of the Communist Party and, most tragically, the disbandment of the Democratic Alliance.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> David Wurfel, “Philippine Agrarian Reform under Magsaysay,” *Far Eastern Survey* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1958): 7–15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3024074>.

<sup>35</sup> R. M. N. Galang, “A Brief History of the Philippine Communist Movement,” SSRN, 2012, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2084850>, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=leadership-and-strategy-faculty-pubs>



In retrospect, Magsaysay's legacy lies in his ability to redefine infrastructure development as both a practical and ideological project. He envisioned FMRs as the foundation of an inclusive, democratic, and self-reliant nation. By integrating infrastructure with nationalism and community participation, his presidency reshaped the narrative of post-war development and inspired a renewed sense of ownership and optimism among the rural poor.

### **Carlos P. Garcia (1957–1961)**

President Carlos Garcia continued and expanded upon Magsaysay's FMR interventions during his presidency from 1957 to 1961, known as the Romualdez Plan. His administration emphasized private sector investments in infrastructure, including FMRs, as a crucial component of his Five-Year Social Development Program aimed at enhancing agricultural production to meet both domestic needs and international demand for food and raw materials. Garcia's Five-Year Social Development Program emphasized increasing agricultural output to meet both domestic consumption needs and growing international demand, especially considering expanding trade relations with industrial powers like Germany and Japan. His political rhetoric underscored the indispensability of FMRs in achieving an industrialized economy, despite criticisms of inequitable economic distribution.<sup>36</sup>

He pursued FMR construction vigorously, leveraging agricultural trade agreements with countries like Germany and Japan to promote agro-industrial development. Approximately 8 percent of his rural development program was allocated to FMR initiatives, and he actively sought US development loans to support industrialization and diversify the agricultural sector.

His administration embraced the market-oriented nature of FMRs, emphasizing their potential economic efficiency and role in facilitating agricultural growth and rural development. He adopted a more market-oriented approach to rural development, promoting private sector investment in infrastructure projects, including FMRs. Approximately 8 percent of his rural development budget was allocated to FMR initiatives, and he actively pursued United States development loans to support the twin goals of agricultural diversification and industrial development. FMRs under

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<sup>36</sup> Yusuke Takagi, "The 'Filipino First' Policy and the Central Bank, 1958–1961: Island of State Strength and Economic Decolonization," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62, no. 2 (2014): 233–61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2014.0015>.

Garcia were seen as instrumental in unlocking the economic potential of the countryside, especially in agro-industrial zones, which required reliable connectivity to function efficiently. His policies aimed to improve transportation networks to rural areas, thereby enhancing access to markets and stimulating economic activities in agriculture and related industries, to wit:

To achieve a more efficient distribution of goods, especially the products of our farms, as well as to facilitate travel among our people, we have expanded our network of roads.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, he also emphasized on the narrative that FMRs were vital infrastructure in connecting significant economic sectors to pursue country-wide industrialization. He emphasized the construction of roads and bridges across agricultural and mineral-rich regions to better link production zones to export terminals, signaling a shift towards a more integrated vision of economic development.

We have to build roads and bridges over agricultural and mining areas to connect them with ports. As a necessary step towards genuine industrialization, we have to set up an integrated steel manufacturing industry. We must carry on such projects as the construction of feeder roads in rural areas the construction of a Mindanao development road system of almost 800 kilometers, of which 419 kilometers have already been completed... [exploring other goals] include the building and intensifying feeder roads in agriculturally developing areas like Mindanao and Cagayan Valle.<sup>38</sup>

With the Laurel–Langley Agreement replacing the Philippine Trade Act, Garcia's administration opened the economy gradually while retaining exchange controls. The World Bank (WB) issued its first major Philippine loan (Binga Hydroelectric Plant, 1957) and supported infrastructure to boost agricultural and industrial production. Road expansion continued as part of national highway programs that facilitated market-oriented agriculture. His tenure built upon Magsaysay's foundation, expanding FMR projects and promoting private sector involvement in infrastructure development. His FMRs under the Romualdez Plan played a pivotal role in connecting barangays to market outlets, railroad networks, and highway trunk lines, facilitating increased agricultural production and attracting private

<sup>37</sup> C. Garcia, "The First State of the Nation Address (SONA)." Inquirer.net, January 27, 1958, <https://sona.inquirer.net/207/state-of-the-nation-address-1958-carlos-garcia/>.

<sup>38</sup> C. Garcia, "The Second State of the Nation Address (SONA)" (The Philippine Gazette, January 1959), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1959/01/26/carlos-p-garcia-second-state-of-the-nation-address-january-26-1959/>.

investments in agriculture.<sup>39</sup> Initially planned to transition from asphalt to concrete FMRs with the establishment of cement factories, these aspirations were curtailed due to funding constraints. His strategic emphasis on FMRs as critical infrastructure underscored their role in supporting agricultural productivity, economic growth, and international trade, reflecting his administration's commitment to modernizing the Philippine economy during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Initially planned to transition from asphalt to concrete FMRs with the establishment of cement factories, these aspirations were curtailed due to funding constraints. While Garcia's tenure expanded FMR type infrastructure significantly, his Filipino First Policy prioritized the use of domestic resources, local industries, and Filipino entrepreneurs over foreign investors in key sectors. In infrastructure terms, this meant emphasizing projects that would strengthen domestic agricultural production and reduce dependence on imported food. However, analysts noted that the benefits of these road developments disproportionately accrued to private investors, with limited trickle-down effects for smallholder farmers. The emphasis on export-oriented agriculture and industrial partnerships often sidelined land reform measures, which were inadequately supported by legislation. Amidst austerity and inflation, rural communities continued to face tenancy, insufficient farm credit, and weak institutional support. Moreover, while the policy rhetorically pushed for domestic control, the financing environment still shaped by International Monetary Fund (IMF) foreign exchange controls and the WB's expanding project portfolio required that road programs align with international lenders' priorities. As a result, rural road expansion indirectly advanced export-oriented agriculture alongside its intended domestic market aims.

Despite these limitations, Garcia's tenure reinforced the centrality of FMRs in the national development narrative. His administration solidified the image of roads as indispensable tools for economic modernization, aligning infrastructure with the broader goals of self-sufficiency, trade competitiveness, and rural revitalization. While Garcia's approach leaned heavily toward economic liberalization and privatization, it maintained the symbolic and strategic weight of FMRs established by Magsaysay.

In conclusion, President Carlos P. Garcia's administration represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of FMR policy in the Philippines. His government sought to sustain agricultural growth, encourage foreign and domestic investment, and leverage infrastructure as a vehicle for industrial expansion. While critiques of inequitable development outcomes and

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<sup>39</sup> National Economic Council (NEC), "The Romualdez Plan: Five-Year Economic and Social Development Program for FY 1957-1961." (Manila: National Economic Council, n.d.), accessed January 2, 2022.

insufficient rural support services persisted, Garcia's tenure laid the groundwork for future administrations to continue prioritizing FMRs as core elements of rural and national development strategy. The Romualdez Plan, though tempered by fiscal constraints, extended the legacy of FMRs as both a practical and ideological foundation of post-war economic planning.

### Diosdado Macapagal (1961- 1965)

Diosdado Macapagal's presidency marked a significant period where FMRs were central to his vision of economic development and social progress in the Philippines. His economic strategy was anchored in a policy of free enterprise and the decontrol program initiated in 1962, which lifted foreign exchange and import controls to encourage private sector growth and expand trade. This shift was supported by his Agricultural Land Reform Code of 1963, aimed at dismantling tenancy and promoting owner-cultivator farming. His rhetoric consistently emphasized the pivotal role of FMRs in achieving market-oriented economic goals, enhancing rural infrastructure, reducing poverty, and strengthening rural integration within national and global economies. His public pronouncements underscored the necessity of basic infrastructure in the nation's path toward development. He stated unequivocally:

*The first requirement for the government is to ensure the judicious application of public investment programs to the establishment of basic facilities such as roads...More basic developmental effort will be necessary... Further development of mining, agriculture, and forestry will involve more substantial investments in basic facilities—roads.<sup>40</sup>*

Under his Development Plan (1959–1962) and in line with the decontrol policy's emphasis on competitiveness and export growth, Macapagal prioritized FMR construction as essential to addressing low agricultural productivity and fostering rural development.<sup>41</sup> Through his FMR interventions, he constructed a 200 kilometer-road in coordination with National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration. In addition, he created 2,350-kilometer cemented road, 2000-kilometer asphalt road, 900-kilometer developmental roads, 3,500 linear meters of bridges, and 3,000-kilometer rural roads. Furthermore, he also leveraged FMR projects to promote community involvement and local development. Through

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<sup>40</sup> Diosdado Macapagal, "First State of the Nation Address" (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, January 22, 1962), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1962/01/22/diosdado-macapagal-first-state-of-the-nation-address-january-22-1962/>.

<sup>41</sup> National Economic Council (NEC), *The Locsin Report: Three-Year Program for Economic and Social Development for FY 1961–1962* (Manila: National Economic Council, 1959), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WoHGWxpyPxFNdaG2dGiW9qof8KsSPUTO/view>.

initiatives like the Emergency Employment Act (EEA), which aimed to create jobs through land clearing and feeder road construction, he tapped into fresh graduates and unemployed individuals, instilling a sense of pride and community participation in rural development efforts, *"the EEA has embarked on twelve projects for the clearing of land and the construction of feeder roads encompassing a total area of 20,000 hectares."*<sup>42</sup>

Importantly, his FMR strategy was not limited to material development; it also encompassed community engagement and employment generation. Through programs such as the Emergency Employment Act (EEA), his administration mobilized fresh graduates and unemployed citizens to participate in rural development projects—including land clearing and feeder road construction across 20,000 hectares. These efforts sought to instill a sense of civic pride, local agency, and national unity, positioning infrastructure development as a participatory nation-building endeavor.

His administration's approach to FMRs aligned with global perspectives on rural development, particularly those advocated by institutions like the World Bank, which recognized FMRs as crucial for integrating rural economies into broader economic frameworks and stimulating local development.<sup>43</sup> Macapagal framed FMRs not just as infrastructure projects but as tools for poverty reduction, agrarian reform, and overall social development, projecting an image of modernity and progress for the Philippines.

His enthusiasm about the FMRs' symbolic value and its inclination to tap the community in building motivated the citizenry. However, despite his enthusiasm and strategic alignment, criticisms surfaced regarding the equitable distribution of benefits from FMR projects. The intended beneficiaries—small farmers and rural communities—often failed to fully reap the economic rewards, as the benefits disproportionately accrued to local elites and landlords. This uneven distribution underscored challenges in implementing comprehensive agrarian reform and ensuring that infrastructure development translated into tangible improvements in farmers' income and productivity.

In conclusion, Macapagal's economic reforms such as currency decontrol, free enterprise, and the Agricultural Land Reform Code directly shaped his FMR program by linking rural infrastructure to both market integration and

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<sup>42</sup> Diosdado Macapagal, "Second State of the Nation Address" (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, January 28, 1963), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1963/01/28/diosdado-macapagal-second-state-of-the-nation-address-january-28-1963/>.

<sup>43</sup> World Bank, *Transportation Sector Working Paper* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1975).



land reform. His presidency extended the narrative of infrastructure as national salvation, framing roads as both the literal and figurative pathways to progress. While significant strides were made in terms of infrastructure expansion and mobilizing community involvement, enduring challenges—particularly in equitable benefit distribution and agrarian justice—highlighted the limits of infrastructure-led development absent deeper structural reform. Nevertheless, his tenure contributed to solidifying the FMR as a central motif in the postcolonial state's developmental repertoire, linking the countryside to national aspirations of modernization and prosperity.

### Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986)

Ferdinand Marcos's presidency in the Philippines, spanning two decades, was marked by a robust focus on infrastructure development, with a particular emphasis on FMRs as essential for economic growth and modernization. His administration prioritized accelerated road improvement initiatives aimed at creating a sturdy physical framework to bolster economic expansion. His vision surpassed previous administrations in terms of both the scale and output of infrastructure projects, setting ambitious goals to enhance connectivity and accessibility across the country. He articulated the pivotal role of infrastructure, stating, *"the government's output of roads and other infrastructure projects exceeded the total accomplishments of preceding administrations"*.<sup>44</sup>

This statement underscores his commitment to surpassing historical benchmarks in infrastructure development, highlighting FMRs as crucial components for linking agricultural regions to urban centers and export market. He emphasized FMR development to enhance connectivity and modernize transportation networks, framing them as vital for achieving economic growth and fostering agricultural productivity, to wit:

The government must provide a solid physical base that adequately supports planned and sustained economic growth. We seek to provide a structurally safe and sufficient network of major thoroughfares, with supplementary integrable developmental road systems... We intend to build no less than 1,500 kilometers of concrete roads and more of asphalt and

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<sup>44</sup> Ferdinand E. Marcos, "Third State of the Nation Address" (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, January 22, 1968), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1968/01/22/ferdinand-e-marcos-third-state-of-the-nation-address-january-22-1968/>.

gravel roads to these ends. In addition, we intend to improve 16,000 kilometers of feeder road.<sup>45</sup>

To support his narrative, his former head economist, Gerardo Sicat, shared:

He (Marcos) put in the major trunkline road networks within the country, in his two terms in office, he concentrated on the road network.<sup>46</sup>

He demonstrated a strong inclination towards market-oriented agriculture, evident through his prioritization of road projects in rural areas aimed at enhancing rice and corn self-sufficiency, boosting agricultural output, and supporting domestic commerce. He positioned FMRs as integral to his strategic plans for economic development, underscoring their role in improving connectivity and facilitating agricultural productivity. His administration also emphasized responsive infrastructure development, particularly in expanding road networks to stimulate economic growth and regional development, to wit:

We have built up the physical underpinnings of our economic development faster and more thoroughly than any other administration before us. Moreover, the government's output of roads and other infrastructure projects exceeded the total accomplishments of preceding administrations.<sup>47</sup>

His commitment to FMRs as crucial for economic growth paved the way for extensive expansion during his tenure. Gilbert Llanto highlighted that Marcos oversaw the construction of 103,321 kilometers of roads, a significant increase of 187 percent compared to his predecessors.<sup>48</sup> Much of this expansion was funded by ODA. One of his key initiatives was the Philippine Rural Roads Program, later integrated into the Special Infrastructure Project under the Provincial Development Assistance Project. Administered by the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, this project exemplified His enthusiasm for using FMRs to enhance farm-to-market access. He aimed to decentralize the FMR intervention's planning and implementation. Phase 1 was a \$15 million loan agreement with USAID

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<sup>45</sup> Ferdinand E. Marcos, "First State of the Nation Address" (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, January 24, 1966), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1966/01/24/ferdinand-e-marcos-first-state-of-the-nation-address-january-24-1966/>.

<sup>46</sup> Gerardo P Sicat, "The Economic Legacy of Marcos" (UP School of Economics Discussion Papers, November 2011), <https://pssc.org.ph/wp-content/pssc-archives/Works/Gerardo%20Sicat/The%20economic%20legacy%20of%20Marcos.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Marcos, "Third State of the Nation Address."

<sup>48</sup> Llanto, "Investing in Local Roads for Economic Growth."

from 1975 to 1978. It created 415 kilometers of FMRs and 4,368 linear meters of bridges in thirty-one participating provinces, with a 75-25 between national and local government funding scheme. Phase 2, worth \$24 million, continued this momentum with the construction of approximately 600 kilometers of roads and 6,000 meters of bridges.

During his Five-Year Development Program (1970-1974), Marcos reinforced his narrative of FMRs as indispensable for economic growth.<sup>49</sup> The program not only aimed at expanding the road network but also incentivized private sector investments in infrastructure such as irrigation and FMRs. The Rice and Roads program, a centerpiece of this initiative, contributed to a seven percent annual growth in the road network. FMR development received significant priority, constituting fifty-five percent of the total road length in the Philippines during that period.

His Four-Year Development Plan (1971-1974) underscored Ferdinand Marcos's recognition of FMRs as essential for regional development and economic growth in the Philippines. During this period, Marcos intensified efforts to strengthen regional development initiatives, focusing on enhancing the country's primary road and FMR networks. Specifically, the plan aimed to improve 3,500 kilometers of primary roads and 2,200 kilometers of FMRs, while also undertaking the construction of 4,400 kilometers of new FMRs. These investments were strategically allocated to bolster the FMR networks, anticipating future traffic demands and supporting national economic self-sufficiency goals in the agriculture sector. His emphasis on expanding and improving FMR infrastructure during his Four-Year Development Plan reflected his administration's commitment to fostering agricultural productivity, facilitating market access for rural communities, and promoting regional economic integration across the Philippines. His early nationalist rhetoric gave way to deep IMF and WB engagement, especially after the 1972 declaration of martial law. Structural adjustment programs in the 1980s required trade liberalization, export promotion, and public sector retrenchment. The WB financed FMR as part of integrated rural development projects that served Green Revolution agriculture and export-oriented agribusiness, embedding neoliberal priorities in rural infrastructure policy. FMR was often tied to integrated rural development and military objectives, ensuring mobility for both economic goods and state security forces.

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<sup>49</sup> National Economic Council. *Four-Year Development Plan for the Philippines, Fiscal Years 1971-1974*. Philippines: National Economic Council, 1970. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yMG\\_Z1pn0lVR8VrDO4kB0HEbCkzEk4tB/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yMG_Z1pn0lVR8VrDO4kB0HEbCkzEk4tB/view).

His Four-Year Development Plan (1974-1977) underscored his view of FMRs as crucial pillars supporting agro-industrial development schemes and broader infrastructure and transportation programs in the Philippines.<sup>50</sup> During this period, he strategically utilized international loans, particularly from Japan, to fund significant FMR projects aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and supporting economic growth. One notable initiative under this plan was the Japanese Commodity Loan Package, which financed projects such as the Davao Penal Colony Road. This road aimed to improve the agricultural potential of dollar-earning plantations in Davao by enhancing connectivity and transportation infrastructure. Additionally, Marcos directed resources towards the Layac-Mariveles Superhighway, which catered to the infrastructure needs of the Export Processing Zone in Mariveles, Bataan, facilitating industrial development and export activities.

Furthermore, he leveraged Japanese loans to construct an 800-kilometer FMR network in regions like Cotabato, Bukidnon, and Zamboanga. These projects were integral to pursuing agrarian reforms, opening untapped agricultural areas, supporting tenant farmers, and establishing resettlement sites to promote rural development and economic expansion.

His Four-Year Development Plan (1974-1977) highlighted his strategic use of FMRs as essential components of broader economic strategies, leveraging international funding to bolster agricultural productivity, facilitate industrial growth, and enhance rural infrastructure across the Philippines. Despite the decrease in the share of FMRs from 15 percent in 1970 to 4 percent in 1982, his Five-Year Development Plan (1978-1982) demonstrated the continued importance of FMRs in bolstering various aspects of Philippine development. During this period, FMRs played a crucial role in enhancing agricultural productivity and expanding into previously untapped agricultural hinterlands, particularly in economically depressed areas across Mindanao.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, his administration implemented the Integrated Area Development Approach, which included the provision of FMRs to support small and medium-scale industries. This initiative aimed to improve rural infrastructure and connectivity, thereby facilitating economic activities beyond agriculture alone. Additionally, under his leadership, the overall road

<sup>50</sup> National Economic Council, *Four-Year Development Plan for the Philippines, Fiscal Years 1971-1974* (Philippines: National Economic Council, 1970), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/12OUspuZ3\\_qCrVX8o3qWIZS8vRvgd07Of/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12OUspuZ3_qCrVX8o3qWIZS8vRvgd07Of/view).

<sup>51</sup> National Economic and Development Authority, *Summary of the Five-Year Philippine Development Plan, 1978-1982 (Including the Ten-Year Development Plan, 1978-1987)* (Philippines: National Economic and Development Authority, 1977), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QROV82Ic9ufcGYs7Xc1wilm9Pu5RNJq9/view>.

transportation network saw significant expansion. This growth not only supported agricultural activities but also contributed to industrial and manufacturing production. Furthermore, the improved road infrastructure facilitated the creation of industrial estates, fostering economic growth and development in various regions of the Philippines.

Despite the decline in the proportion of FMRs relative to total road development, his Five-Year Development Plan (1978-1982) highlighted the critical role of FMRs in enhancing agricultural productivity, expanding rural development, and supporting broader industrial and economic goals in the Philippines.

His Updated Philippine Development Plan (1984-1987) supported the Integrated Area Development Strategy but prioritized FMR development in depressed areas with low road densities to encourage domestic growth.<sup>52</sup> In addition, his Regional Development Councils facilitated FMR construction in their regions, which stimulated and sustained regional private sector initiatives. Lastly, he also embraced FMR's image as a political resource. Based on interviews, aside from personally distributing government checks, he also provided FMR budgets to every village captain and other friendly local candidates. This scenario means that politically connected and friendly communities were more likely to obtain funding for FMR construction.

This emphasis on infrastructure was directly tied to his economic programs, various development plans and later the Integrated Area Development Strategy. Each of these policy frameworks positioned rural infrastructure, especially FMRs, as indispensable for raising agricultural productivity, modernizing the countryside, and linking rural producers to markets. During his 20-year presidency, the Philippine road network expanded dramatically, increasing by 187% by 1986 compared to its 1965 levels. This expansion underscored his belief in FMRs as essential for driving economic growth, despite criticisms and controversies surrounding his infrastructure policies.

His discourses on FMRs were not only crafted for elite consumption but also became a means of framing rural development as a national imperative. However, the reception of these discourses across various segments of society, especially rural communities, remained complex, as competing ideologies of development and social justice also shaped public opinion.

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<sup>52</sup> National Economic and Development Authority, *Five-Year Philippine Development Plan, 1978-1982 (Updated for 1981 and 1982)* (Philippines: National Economic and Development Authority, 1980), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L6YUrzQ\\_QF7LmBs6AszvEfsL9pCbVEm9/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L6YUrzQ_QF7LmBs6AszvEfsL9pCbVEm9/view).



While he created an environment conducive to private investments, he often failed to address the unequal distributive consequences of market-led growth. Many of his FMR projects were criticized for their questionable developmental impact and poor construction quality. By 1986, half of the total road network remained all-weather roads, with a majority in substandard condition, reflecting ongoing concerns about infrastructure quality under Marcos's administration. Evidence, such as presented by Amado Mendoza in 2001, indicated a systemic issue of corruption.<sup>53</sup> Marcos and his associates allegedly imposed a "commission system," demanding kickbacks (e.g., 15 percent commission (of the total contract price) from Japanese suppliers involved in infrastructure projects, particularly FMRs. As a result, Marcos exacted commissions from private Japanese corporations doing Japanese-funded infrastructure projects, most especially on FMRs. These observations confirmed the common assertion about his corruption-ridden infrastructure development. These practices underscored widespread perceptions of corruption and inefficiency in Marcos's infrastructure development efforts. Relatedly, although his successor remained faithful to the narrative that FMR is a vital tool in economic development, she implemented austerity measures due to the burden of the external debt inherited from the previous administration and budget hemorrhage of government financial institutions.

Moreover, despite the emphasis on economic development through FMRs, Marcos's tenure saw stagnation in agricultural productivity and income. Farmers, particularly those cultivating rice, corn, sugarcane, and coconuts, experienced significant declines in real wages and profitability. The slow implementation of agrarian reform, opposition from landlords, and inadequate government support further exacerbated these challenges, contributing to persistently low agricultural productivity and skewed income distribution.<sup>54</sup> For instance, the real wages of Filipinos working the agriculture plunged by 30 percent. Rice, corn sugarcane, and coconut farmers became poorer as they earned 20 percent less in 1986.<sup>55</sup> The slow agrarian reform implementation, landlords' opposition, Marcos government's lack of commitment to agrarian reform, inadequate provision of sustainable credit,

<sup>53</sup> Amado M. Mendoza, Jr, "The Industrial Anatomy of Corruption: Government Procurement, Bidding and Award of Contracts," *Public Policy Journal* V, no. 1 (2001): 43–71, <https://cids.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Industrial-Anatomy-of-Corruption-vol.5-no.1-Jan-June-2001-3.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Jon Goss and James K. Boyce, "The Philippines: The Political Economy of Growth and Impoverishment in the Marcos Era," *Economic Geography* 71, no. 1 (January 1995): 103, <https://doi.org/10.2307/144437>.

<sup>55</sup> Edna A. Reyes, Edwin Milan, and Ma Teresa C. Sanchez, "Employment Productivity and Wages in the Philippine Labor Market: An Analysis of Trends and Policies" (Working Paper Series, 8903. Manila: PIDS, February 1989), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidswp8903.pdf>.

technical assistance, and marketing resulted in low agricultural productivity levels and highly skewed income distribution.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to Marcos's legacy, his successor-maintained rhetoric on the importance of FMRs for economic development but faced austerity measures due to inherited external debt and financial mismanagement. This shift highlighted the ongoing challenges and contradictions in Philippine economic policies, particularly concerning infrastructure development and agricultural reform.

In summary, while Marcos's presidency witnessed substantial infrastructure growth, particularly in the road network, his FMR initiatives were marred by allegations of corruption, substandard quality, and insufficient impact on agricultural development and income equality. These complexities underscore the multifaceted challenges of balancing economic growth with equitable development in the Philippines during Marcos's era and beyond. His economic policies such as heavy borrowing, prioritization of export-oriented agriculture, and alignment with IMF and WB liberalization mandates both enabled and constrained FMR expansion. On one hand, they secured financing for large-scale rural road projects; on the other, they skewed infrastructure benefits towards commercial farms and export zones, leaving many small farmers excluded.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates how FMRs emerged as key tools through which political leaders in the Philippines developed their economic and infrastructure ideologies, given their significant socio-economic impact. By serving as both technical and political solutions for agricultural development, FMRs became powerful political artifacts embedded with ideological, symbolic, and strategic meaning.

Philippine presidents deployed FMRs to articulate visions of national development, assert state presence in rural areas, and consolidate political power. As this historical analysis reveals, FMRs were central to four recurring themes in presidential discourse: 1) FMRs as a sign of development, 2) FMRs as vital and inevitable, 3) FMRs as sources of political capital, and 4) FMRs as national symbols.

First, the framing of FMRs as vital and inevitable in official documents, development plans, and State of the Nation Addresses reflected the leaders'

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<sup>56</sup> Donald S. Zagoria and John Bresnan, "Crisis in the Philippines: The Marcos Era and Beyond," *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (1987): 914, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043179>.

reliance on large-scale projects to fulfill national goals such as modernization and economic growth.<sup>57</sup> Presented as inevitable, they reflected high-modernist aspirations and technocratic planning. These roads were presented as essential solutions for poverty reduction, agricultural development, and economic growth. Presidents Magsaysay and Macapagal linked FMR interventions to social development programs, elevating their importance. Roxas and Quirino's FMR priorities were shaped by postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation policies; Garcia's Filipino First Policy emphasized roads to strengthen domestic production; Macapagal integrated them with agrarian reform and employment-generation programs, while Marcos tied FMRs to export-oriented growth and industrial corridors. These shifts show how each administration's economic policies directly molded the character and focus of their respective FMR projects.

Second, FMRs were framed as symbols of development, with all presidents believing that improved connectivity would open new markets for rural producers and enhance businesses in agriculture, forestry, and mining. Framed as vital to modernization, FMRs were celebrated as conduits of economic growth, particularly through their role in linking rural producers to markets. This supports Scott's argument that political leaders facilitated "high modernism" through such infrastructural projects, advancing a vision of development.<sup>58</sup>

Third, FMRs were also used as symbols of nationalism, community, and patriotism. FMRs were infused with nationalistic rhetoric, mobilizing rural communities under narratives of unity and self-help. Drawing on Vittorini's idea of nationalism as reliant on strong symbolism, Philippine leaders employed FMRs to transform abstract national ideals into tangible realities, fostering a sense of unity and purpose.<sup>59</sup> Presidents Magsaysay and Macapagal used emotional appeals to rally citizens to their ideologies, aligning infrastructure projects with nationalist rhetoric.

Fourth, FMRs were framed as political resources, with leaders such as Marcos leveraging infrastructure projects to build sociopolitical capital. As tools of patronage, they were selectively allocated to reward political loyalty and bolster regime support, most notably under Ferdinand Marcos. This demonstrates how patronage politics were at play, with infrastructure

<sup>57</sup> Francois Molle, ed., *The "Greening of Isaan": Politics, Ideology and Irrigation Development in the Northeast of Thailand*, in *Contested Waterscapes in the Mekong Region*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781849770866>.

<sup>58</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Simona Vittorini, "Representing the Nation: Competing Symbolic Repertoires in India" (PhD, University of London, 2006), <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/29237/1/10731332.pdf>.

budgets funneled to local politicians and communities loyal to the ruling administration.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, FMRs played a role in the political and ideological strategy of containing communist insurgency in rural areas. By extending government presence, facilitating the mobility of security forces, and delivering essential services to marginalized communities, these roads contributed to efforts aimed at minimizing insurgent influence. While FMRs alone were not sufficient to end unrest, their integration into broader state-building and counterinsurgency strategies highlights the dual developmental and political significance of rural infrastructure.

This study explains how FMRs functioned as political machinery for leaders to craft their historical narratives, enhance political capital, and legitimize their authority. It highlights the conscious role of political leaders in shaping, selecting, and manipulating ideologies, and how these ideologies were used to mobilize groups, defend interests, and compete with rivals.<sup>61</sup>

This study underscores the significance of FMR interventions not only as infrastructural projects but as vehicles for the promotion of neoliberal ideologies. By analyzing these interventions through the lens of neoliberalism, this research challenges traditional perspectives that view infrastructure solely through economic or technical lenses. It broadens the historiography of rural development in the Philippines, offering new insights into how infrastructure projects were deeply intertwined with the political agendas of successive administrations. These roads became both material and symbolic embodiments of governance, legitimizing state authority while masking persistent inequalities in rural development. By examining FMRs through a historical-political lens, this study contributes to a broader understanding of infrastructure as ideological terrain. In the Philippine context, the FMR was not merely a road but a stage upon which competing visions of the nation, development, and democracy were constructed, contested, and performed. \*

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<sup>60</sup> Mark R Thompson, "Populism and the Revival of Reform: Competing Political Narratives in the Philippines," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, no. 1 (April 2010): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1355/CS32-1A>.

<sup>61</sup> W. H. Morris-Jones and Paul R. Brass, "Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 1 (1993): 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760037>.

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