

The Labor-Exporting State's Repertoire of Action: Theory and Evidence from the Philippines

The labor-exporting state has generally been depicted in the academic literature as weak and neoliberal. This has tended to emphasize the self-interested aspect of states that export labor rather than their concerns for the welfare and human rights of their migrant workers. In this paper, we argue that the labor-exporting state is a much more complex structure whose actions must be understood across a wide gamut. To do so, we develop a theory of the characteristics of the labor-exporting state, which we call a "repertoire of action." We identify three key aspects of this repertoire: social discipline, rhetorical performance, and institutional responsiveness. We analyze this repertoire of action through four key Philippine administrations: those of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986), Corazon Aquino (1986-1992), Fidel Ramos (1992-1998), as well as of Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022). At a broad level, these administrations can be distinguished from each other in terms of their types of action, but at a more micro level, they similarly employ elements of discipline, performance, and responsiveness.

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