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RODRIGO DUTERTE

Philippines: Duterte got licenses for over 300 guns 2 weeks before his term ended

Sunday 10 December 2023, by [BOLLEDO Jairo](#), [BUAN Lian](#), [GAVILAN Jodesz](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2023).

Among the expensive rifles that Duterte owns is one priced at P350,000, while another costs about P163,000. Former lawmaker Carlos Zarate asks him: 'As a former president, you already have PSG [Personal Security Guards], what will prevent other people from asking the same kind of privilege?'

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MANILA, Philippines – Just two weeks before he officially ended his term as Philippine president, known [gun enthusiast Rodrigo Duterte](#) registered at least 358 firearms, all with 10-year validities and legal backing through a law he enacted also in 2022.

Rappler has verified with various sources that Duterte's guns were all approved by the national police for licensing in June 2022, with an expiration in March 2032. The Philippine National Police (PNP), via its Firearms and Explosives Office (FEO), is the country's issuer of gun licenses and the main regulator.

Rappler obtained copies of FEO certifications, which we have verified. The documents say information on the licensed guns "exist in the FEO records."

Asked for comment on their licensing of at least 358 guns for one individual such as Duterte, the PNP FEO – citing data privacy – told Rappler in a message on Thursday, December 7, "We cannot provide you the exact figures on this."

"We can say [that] as long as a qualified individual possesses a Type 5 LTOPF (Licence to Own and Possess Firearm), and [is] a gun collector, he/she may possess more than 15 guns/firearms," said the PNP FEO.

Being a gun collector is not a prerequisite certification to get a Type 5 license. One has to submit the usual requirements (drug test, psychological test, etc.) plus have a vault at home that the PNP-FEO should check and determine to be sufficient for the gun collection. Compliance with these requirements can facilitate obtaining a Type 5 license, which automatically makes the license holder a gun collector.

Duterte holds a Type 5 license, and under the law, a Type 5 license specifically allows “certified gun collectors” to have more than 15 guns.

More than half of the licensed firearms – at least 222 – are pistols, the documents showed. Duterte has an AK-47 pistol. Among his collection of 73 rifles is an AK-47. This is noted because AK-47s, branded as [“weapons of choice”](#) by extremist groups, are among assault weapons that some American states seek to ban to address persisting gun violence in the US.

According to the documents, Duterte also has in his stash the [Israeli-made](#) high-powered rifle Galil, an assault rifle said to match the Russian AK-47.

While current laws do not impose a limit on how many guns a certified gun collector may own, there is a laxity of regulations that can be abused, said Carlos Zarate, a gun control advocate, both in his capacity as former lawmaker and human rights lawyer.

It also raises concerns about possible implications on peace and order in a country where there has been extensive gun violence, usually from private armies. Duterte is [tagged](#) in the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) investigation into the alleged Davao Death Squad, and the government’s campaign against drugs, where tens of thousands were killed with guns.

The United States once [paused the sale](#) of assault rifles to the Philippines in November 2016 over heightened concerns over the drug war killings.

We tried to get Duterte’s side and reached out on December 7 to his former spokesperson Harry Roque, his former aide and now Senator Bong Go, his former executive secretary Salvador Medialdea, and Medialdea’s firm which recently appeared for him in a preliminary investigation in the grave threat complaint filed against the former president by Act Teachers Party-list Representative France Castro.

Roque told Rappler, “I am no longer his spokesperson” and deferred to Go. Go’s staff told Rappler to try Medialdea. We again reached out to Medialdea morning of Friday, December 8, and though he had seen the message, has not responded as of writing. Neither has his firm, which we emailed through the two lawyers who appeared for Duterte in the Castro complaint. We called Medialdea on Saturday, December 9, but he did not pick up. We will update this story once we get a reply from the Duterte camp.

What are those guns for?

Those who know him have described Duterte as a gun enthusiast. His former defense secretary, Delfin Lorenzana, [said in 2017](#) that Duterte has been carrying a gun since the ‘90s. In January 2022, Duterte said he has 10 guns. “All of them have a license, I got licenses for them,” said Duterte in Filipino during a [speech](#) where he railed against armed communist rebels.

However, through the years as a public official, Duterte has not specifically listed any firearm as property in his Statements of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALNs), according to the copies Rappler has on file for 1998-2000, 2002-2009, 2012-2014, and 2016-2017.

At least 72 of the 222 pistols with brands and models identified and registered under Duterte already have an estimated value of P5.5 million, based on latest available retail prices of leading firearm sellers in the Philippines. Including other guns – based on the cheapest models of rifles, revolvers, and shotguns, among others – a conservative estimate of Duterte’s stash ranges from P5.5

million to P7 million.

Duterte's last known net worth was P28.5 million, according to his 2017 SALN.

Duterte's SALNs from 2018 until he stepped down from the presidency [have been kept secret](#) from the public, backed by a supplemental policy from the [Office of the Ombudsman](#) which, until Duterte's time, was the office that released SALNs of presidents every year.

A favored law

Duterte would not have had 10-year licenses had he not enacted a law on May 6, 2022, or a month before turning over the presidency. He passed Republic Act 11766, which amended two sections of the Noynoy Aquino-time RA 10591. These sections would later turn out to be beneficial to Duterte when he registered the 358 firearms.

Duterte's RA 11766 extended the validity of firearm licenses to 5-10 years, meaning a license to own can be valid for that period, and registration can be renewed after every 10 years. In RA 10591, license to own was valid for only two years, and registration could be renewed only every four years.

License to own is an authority to buy a firearm, required to be seen by the seller; whereas registration is the document accompanying the firearm already in the possession of the owner.

The law requires that people who apply for a license to carry outside their house or workplace must prove that there is an imminent danger to their lives.

Under RA 10591, eight professions were automatically considered to face imminent danger, therefore making it easier for professionals in these fields to obtain a permit: lawyers, accountants, journalists, cashiers/bank tellers, religious leaders, physicians and nurses, engineers, and businessmen. In Duterte's new law, he added two more, as if to accommodate himself - elected officials, both past and present, and military and law enforcement personnel, both retired and active.

APPLICANT. President Rodrigo Duterte applies for a license to own and possess a firearm on August 7, 2018 at the Malacañang Palace. Presidential photo

Why so many

The law is silent on the maximum number that an individual can own. To Zarate, the number 358 alone is concerning "because will all those guns just be for yourself?"

"Ang 358 firearms ay parang oversized company or an undersized battalion na puwede mong armas. Kahit sabihin mo na nakalisensya sa kanya personally, puwede niya ipagamit 'yan. That's really a ground for concern," Zarate told Rappler.

(358 arms is like arming an oversized company or an undersized battalion. Even if you say that's your personal license, you can lend it to others.)

The PNP-FEO said a license is non-transferable. The FEO also told Rappler that former presidents don't have special privileges in terms of gun licensing, adding that anyone can avail of licenses to own and possess firearms, as well as obtain firearm registrations.

“Even though it is subjective what is necessary to protect you, but grabe ang 300+ (it is excessive). As a former president, you already have PSG (Presidential Security Group), what will prevent other people from asking the same kind of privilege?” Zarate told Rappler.

As early as 2010, the Philippine government through the ad-hoc Independent Commission Against Private Armies (ICAPA) had recommended putting a cap on the quantity and calibre of firearms that an individual can possess. The legal basis for the no-limit possession is Executive Order No. 194 of year 2000, which the ICAPA wanted expressly repealed. But it never was, neither through Aquino, also a known gun enthusiast, nor Duterte.

The ICAPA also recommended the passage of an anti-private armies law that would have decentralized the authority from the PNP to issue licenses, and instead give the power to an independent commission. ICAPA was formed after the Ampatuan massacre in Maguindanao in 2009, the murder in broad daylight of 58 people. The Ampatuan clan, their private armies, and local police had [conspired in the murder](#).

Duterte’s collection of 358 firearms is about one-fourth of the 1,200 assorted firearms seized from the Ampatuan clan after the [massacre](#). The Ampatuans, however, were known to have had mostly military weapons, the bulk of which their foot soldiers managed to move out before the raids on their mansions, military officers involved in those operations said.

ICAPA’S recommendations “were not translated to legislation,” said Zarate. “In fact if there were amendments, they relaxed the rules more. That is reflective of the composition of Congress, because many of them have armed bodyguards. That is one of the most difficult to pass – gun control laws – because majority of members of Congress are owners of guns,” said Zarate in a mix of English and Filipino.

Zarate said the [existing regulations](#) must be stricter. “Ang nangyayari kasi naiikutan talaga regulations nila, kahit mga psychiatric exams, etc., may mga fixers pa rin. Isa ito sa malaking pinagkakakitaan,” he added.

(What happens is that the regulations are skirted, there are fixers for requirements such as psychiatric exams. This is a source of business.)

Guns in his stash

Figure

More than half of Duterte’s firearms – at least 222 – are pistols. A pistol is “a hand-operated firearm having a chamber integral with or permanently aligned with the bore which may be self-loading,” according to Republic Act No. 10591 or the [Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act of 2012](#).

One of the higher priced ones in Duterte’s possession, based on obtained documents, is a [9mm KRISS Vector SDP, worth P261,000](#). According to the [manufacturer’s website](#), this model of pistol is the “ideal choice for personal protection and home defense.”

At least 72 or 21% of the firearms registered under the name of the former president are rifles. These are “designed to be fired from the shoulder that can discharge a bullet through a rifled barrel by different actions of loading, which may be classified as lever, bolt, or self-loading.”

One of the expensive rifles that Duterte owns is an [Agencija Alan Assault Rifle Type VHS K](#) worth P350,000, and a [VHS-D](#) worth about the same. Another is a Kalashnikov KR-9, a “[civilian legal semi-automatic](#) rifle based on the Russian Vityaz submachine gun” priced at [P163,000](#).

The documents obtained by Rappler also show that Duterte has 45 revolvers, 13 shotguns, 2 small arms, and 1 high-powered rifle.

The total 358 licensed to Duterte do not include 13 firearms registered over a three-year period before his presidency, with the earliest license obtained in March 2011 and the latest in March 2014. These licenses expired between March 2015 and March 2016, or in the one-year period before he was sworn into office.

The licenses registered under Duterte prior to becoming president included eight rifles and five pistols, estimated to be worth between P900,000 to P1 million in total. – Rappler.com

LIAN BUAN, JAIRO BOLLEDO, JODESZ GAVILAN

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