

## Half of Pinoys unhappy with handling of massacre

Written by Administrator

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Nov. 19, 2010



**Andal Ampatuan Jr. (l.) is escorted to his trial at the Quezon City Regional Trial Court. (Reuters photo)**

MANILA — Almost half of the Philippines' population is dissatisfied with the way the government is handling the pursuit of justice for the victims of the Nov. 23 Maguindanao massacre, the latest survey by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed.

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The SWS poll, conducted from Sept. 24 to 27, showed 47 percent of 1,200 respondents dissatisfied, while 35 percent is satisfied with the handling of the case against the Ampatuan clan, for a net satisfaction score of -12 or “poor.”

In the December 2009 survey, the government received a net satisfaction score of neutral -2 (44 percent dissatisfied and 41 percent satisfied).

The survey, first published in BusinessWorld last Tuesday, was released a week before the massacre’s first anniversary.

The Ampatuan clan of Maguindanao allegedly orchestrated the murder of 57 people, at least 30 of them journalists, in an attempt to stop a rival political clan from contesting their political hold in the May 2010 elections.

The SWS survey showed that public satisfaction in the handling of the case worsened in all areas except in balance of Luzon, where it stayed neutral at +1 from -1 previously.

It fell by 28 points in the Visayas, to a “poor” -27 from a “neutral” +1, by 15 points in Metro Manila to a “poor” -23 from a “neutral” -8, and by 11 points in Mindanao to a “poor” -17 from a “neutral” -6.

Seven in 10 respondents or 70 percent were “somewhat closely” following news about the case.

This level of interest was highest in Mindanao at 77 percent, followed by Metro Manila, 73 percent, and the balance of Luzon and the Visayas, both at 68 percent.

The survey has sampling error margins of plus or minus three percentage points for national, and plus or minus six percentage points for area percentages.

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SWS defined net satisfaction ratings as follows: +70 and above are classified as “excellent;” +50 to +69, “very good;” +30 to +49, “good;” +10 to +29, “moderate;” +9 to -9, “neutral;” -10 to -29, “poor;” -30 to -49, “bad;” -50 to -69, “very bad;” and -70 and below, “execrable.”

The multiple murder case against the Ampatuans is being heard at the Quezon City Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 221 of Judge Jocelyn Solis-Reyes.

While the murder charges against the Ampatuan clan are heard, there have been reports of atrocities supposedly committed by the clan.

Non-government organization Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a report, claimed that there are 52 cases of killings, abductions, and sexual assaults by security forces of the Ampatuans, some committed even before the Arroyo administration.

Justice Secretary Leila de Lima is eyeing a probe into the group’s claims by the Death Investigation Division of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

She said the Arroyo administration was “partly responsible” for the development of the culture of impunity in Maguindanao.

But the spokeswoman for former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, now Pampanga representative, said Arroyo acted with dispatch to bring the Ampatuans to justice.

“Please remember that she was the one who immediately removed the Ampatuans’ power base to pave the way for fair and independent investigation,” said Elena Bautista-Horn.

She noted that after the massacre, the Ampatuans were expelled from then ruling Lakas-Kampi-CMD party.

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Arroyo then asked Mindanao adviser Jesus Dureza to negotiate for the surrender of the suspects.

The report also alleged that the military and police provided manpower for the clan's private armies.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), in reaction to the allegation, promised to punish soldiers who will connive with private armies.

"We have been conducting investigations. The AFP is now conducting measures so that there will be no repeat of the same," said AFP vice chief of staff Lt. Gen. Reynaldo Mapagu. "We will see to it that nobody will be spared if the investigations reveal that they are at fault, that they are involved."

The militant group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan said President Benigno Aquino III should issue an executive order to dismantle paramilitary units to prevent them from being turned into private armies by politicians.

"The Maguindanao massacre should be the last of its kind. No longer should paramilitary units be allowed to become private armies," said Bayan secretary-general Renato Reyes.