

A Critique of *People v. Mateo*

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SUBJECT(S): REMEDIAL LAW

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The Commentary analyzes the case of *People v. Mateo*, which involves appeals from the Regional Trial Court to the Court of Appeals before resorting to an appeal to the Supreme Court in cases where the penalty imposed is death, *reclusion perpetua*, or life imprisonment. In this case, the Supreme Court set a groundbreaking precedent. It required a review be conducted by the Court of Appeals before a death penalty case could be elevated to the Supreme Court. Before the landmark decision, cases where the penalty imposed is death, *reclusion perpetua*, or life imprisonment went directly to the Supreme Court on automatic direct review. The Court based its decision on the idea that a prior determination by the Court of Appeals minimizes the possibility of error on judgment, and statistics showed that 71.77% of cases where the penalty imposed is death have either been modified or vacated when elevated to the Supreme Court on automatic review.

The Commentary first presents the factual antecedents of the case. It then explores the statutory and constitutional basis of the Supreme Court's automatic review of death penalty cases. The Commentary also explores the rule-making power of the Supreme Court and how previous jurisprudence reflects this power. The Commentary presents an analysis of the Sandiganbayan decision and the Supreme Court's grave abuse of its rule-making power when it drastically changed the law and settled jurisprudence on automatic direct review of decisions of the lower court imposing death, *reclusion perpetua*, or life imprisonment. The Author believes that the Court must follow its constitutional duty and that it cannot allow the Court of Appeals to conduct an intermediate review. Its rule-making power must be exercised within the confines of the law and the Constitution. The Author recommends that the ruling should be reversed by restoring the previous rules of procedure on the review of decisions rendered by the lower court imposing the penalty of death, *reclusion perpetua*, or life imprisonment. In addition, a review by the Supreme Court shall have priority over all other cases and a trial where the highest penalty is imposed shall be heard strictly in accordance with the law.