

Philippine Elections 2022: Why Leni’s Fifteen Million Votes Were Not Enough

DUNCAN McCARGO

Fifteen million votes should have been enough to clinch the Philippine presidency. In 2016, Rodrigo Duterte won the presidential election with 16.6 million votes, while in 2010, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino secured 15.2 million votes to achieve victory. Both men won by large margins over their nearest rivals. In 2004, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo achieved a narrow victory with just under 13 million votes. But in 2022, Leni Robredo’s total of 15,035,773 votes brought her nowhere near Malacañang Palace, after her rival Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (popularly known as BBM, short for Bongbong Marcos) received an astounding 31,629,783 votes. Marcos Jr.’s 2022 tally was very close to the combined sum of the votes that he won in his unsuccessful 2016 vice-presidential race and the number of votes that Rodrigo Duterte secured in the presidential race that year. The winning “UniTeam” of Marcos Jr. and his vice-presidential running mate Sara Duterte, daughter of the incumbent president, successfully pooled support from the largely pro-Marcos “solid North” and the Duterte heartlands of

DUNCAN McCARGO is Director of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies and Professor of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. Postal address: Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, Øster Farimagsgade 5, DK-1353, Copenhagen K, Denmark; email: duncan@nias.ku.dk. The author was an officially accredited international observer for the 2022 Philippine elections, under the auspices of the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

Mindanao—as well as the populous Metro Manila region. Only in parts of the Visayas and in the Bicol peninsula did Leni dominate.¹

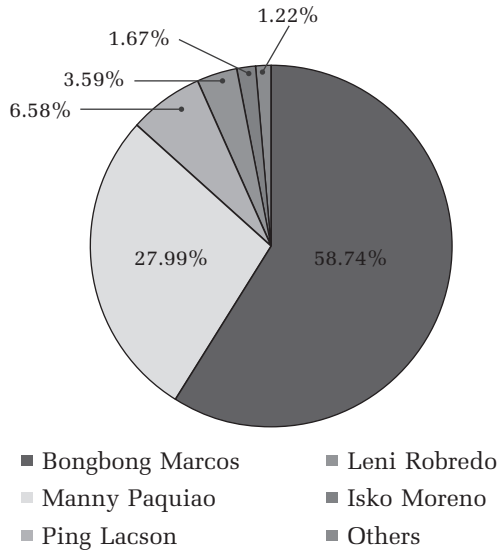
Table 1
Selected Vote Totals, Philippine Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections

Candidate	Year	Office	Votes
Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III	2010	President	15,208,678
Rodrigo Duterte	2016	President	16,601,997
Leni Robredo	2016	Vice-President	14,418,817
Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr	2016	Vice-President	14,155,344
Leni Robredo	2022	President	15,035,773
Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr	2022	President	31,629,783
Sara Duterte	2022	Vice-President	32,208,417
Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan	2022	Vice-President	9,329,207

Source: COMELEC.

How to explain these numbers? Many more people voted in 2022 than in previous elections: 83 per cent of the electorate cast their votes in 2022, compared with 80.67 per cent in 2016 and only 72 per cent in 2010. Most importantly, in 2022 the secondary candidates collapsed. There were 11 candidates on the ballot, but after Marcos Jr. and Leni Robredo, only boxing legend Manny Pacquiao managed a respectable showing with 3.6 million votes. Manila mayor Isko Moreno, once touted as a serious contender, gained less than two million votes, while the rest of the field, including former police chief Ping Lacson, failed to reach one million votes. In the past, presidential votes were usually split between a range of notable candidates, with the eventual victor rarely commanding a majority. In 2016, Duterte had faced serious challenges from three strong opponents: Mar Roxas, Grace Poe and Jeojamar Binay—the combined forces of Roxas and Poe alone could have defeated him. Rodrigo Duterte won in 2016 with 39 per cent of the vote, Noynoy Aquino in 2010 with 42 per cent, both Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2004 and Joseph Estrada in 1998 with 40 per cent, and Fidel Ramos in 1992 with just 23.57 per cent. Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s 58.77 per cent was the highest vote share gained by any presidential candidate since his father’s 1969 re-election.²

Figure 1
Philippine Presidential Vote, 2022 (%)



Source: COMELEC.

Scholars and commentators will be debating for years to come the reasons why Bongbong Marcos won the 2022 election by such a landslide. On the face of it, the result was shocking: Bongbong's father and namesake, Ferdinand E. Marcos, who was ousted from office by the People Power movement in February 1986 and later died in exile, has gone down in history as a kleptocratic ruler who presided over the theft of billions of dollars from Philippine state coffers. Marcos Sr. was also responsible for a wide range of human rights abuses during the martial law period from 1972 to 1981, his widow Imelda is out on bail while she appeals a 42-year jail sentence, and Bongbong himself stands accused of large-scale tax evasion. Not only was the Marcos family notoriously corrupt and abusive, but Bongbong had reached the age of 64 without accomplishing anything of note: despite attending both Oxford University and the Wharton School, he had never obtained a degree. A lightweight with a fondness for West End London musicals, he had been a largely absentee governor of Ilocos Norte, and a legislator—in both Congress and the Senate—with no discernable

legislative legacy. Bongbong bore his father's name, but had clearly inherited neither his abilities nor his work ethic.

So why did he win? Explanations fall broadly into three categories. Much media coverage has stressed the online sphere: the Marcos campaign successfully promoted disinformation about the martial law period, falsely portraying it as a golden era of economic prosperity and social order, and presented the lacklustre Bongbong's presidential candidacy in an extremely positive light, through highly misleading and selective representations of the facts. In a very detailed analysis along these lines, Aries Arugay and Keith Baquisal demonstrate that Philippine elections are highly vulnerable to disinformation and social media manipulation.³

A second set of arguments focuses on how the election worked on the ground, notably the ways electoral alliances are constructed in presidential campaigns, which rely on powerful local and regional brokers, often entrenched political dynasties, to lend support to national candidates. Here the role of Bongbong's running mate Sara Duterte, the daughter of incumbent president Rodrigo Duterte, assumes considerable salience: Sara won even more votes than Marcos. Sol Iglesias has persuasively argued that Duterte helped foster a culture of violence and impunity that paved the way for the BBM-Sara ticket to triumph.⁴

Finally, Bongbong's victory can be explained partly in relation to the shortcomings of his opponents, notably the rival campaign of Leni Robredo, which despite its considerable energy, was never able to galvanize sufficient support. Instead of rallying round a single anti-Marcos candidate, other contenders squabbled among themselves. For example, although trailing her badly in the polls, Isko Moreno held a widely-ridiculed press conference during which he called on Leni to step aside, presumably in his favour.⁵

The doomed Leni *kakampink*, or "pink alliance", campaign was nevertheless one of the most remarkable aspects of the election. Leni had been encouraged to run for the presidency by 1Sambayan (One Nation), a left-liberal coalition spearheaded by former Supreme Court justice Antonio Carpio, with the aim of thwarting Bongbong Marcos' presidential ambitions. While Leni was not initially considered as Marcos' only serious challenger, as early as the first week of December 2021, opinion polls were already pointing to a two-horse race, with Bongbong well in the lead over Leni.⁶ Despite the sometimes vitriolic accusations of pollster bias from pro-Leni commentators, nothing changed substantially over the following six months, and ultimately the opinion polls were entirely vindicated.

Who is Leni Robredo? Her personal story as a widow triumphing against the odds has strong echoes of Cory Aquino, though Leni's politician husband, Jesse, was killed in a 2012 plane crash, and not by an assassin. Jesse had previously served for 19 years as mayor of Naga, a small city in the Bicol region of southern Luzon, before he was appointed Interior Secretary by Benigno Noyroy Aquino III in 2010. A social activist and human rights lawyer, Leni had worked alongside Jesse on rural development and support for marginalized communities. Following Jesse's death, she was elected to Congress, defeating a member of the locally influential Villafuerte dynasty. In Congress, she worked on a range of progressive legislation on issues including good governance, transparency, countering discrimination and the Anti-Dynasty Bill. In 2016, Robredo won the vice-presidency, narrowly defeating Bongbong Marcos—who continued to dispute that election result. In classic Philippine fashion, President Duterte largely ignored his vice-president—who had run on a rival ticket—and the two did not attend each other's inaugurations. In 2022, running as an independent (despite still serving as chair of the Liberal Party), Leni won slightly more votes than she had gained as a vice-presidential candidate in 2016 and garnered almost the same level of support as Noyroy Aquino did in 2010—but this time 15 million ballots were not nearly enough. Her attempts to broaden her appeal beyond the old Aquino/Liberal Party core voting base largely foundered.

Yet Leni's campaign inspired unprecedented excitement among younger voters, especially college students. Groups of youthful Leni supporters sprang up organically all over the country—six to eight people would get together online to form a local branch which would then quickly mushroom, leading to dozens of activists engaging in house-to-house campaigning and hundreds more contributing their time virtually (see Photo 3). A Leni campaign app showed these volunteers how to counter hostile social media posts, and featured scripts to answer questions from sceptical voters.⁷ Leni and her running-mate Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan took their campaign into the pro-Marcos North, holding rallies in Baguio and Vigan (see Photo 2), and a campaign event in Abra. The energy of Leni supporters even in the Marcos heartlands was quite surprising, even though in such places they would not openly wear T-shirts showing support for the Leni-Kiko campaign for fear of being harassed by Bongbong supporters. Leni and her supporters were often subjected to “red-tagging”, or being accused of sympathizing with the communists.⁸

Her campaign posters were sometimes defaced with the letters “NPA”, which stands for the Philippine Communist Party’s New People’s Army (see Photo 1).

Photo 1
Leni Poster Defaced with “NPA”, Abra, 28 April 2022



Source: Duncan McCargo.

Leni’s pink camp generally tapped into progressive political sentiments, embracing diversity, minorities and the marginalized. At the same time, Leni was a devout Catholic whose own social values were quite conservative: she did not even support divorce, let alone same-sex marriage. Leni activists typically saw the election in terms of a generational divide, in which older people—often their parents—were voting on the basis of regionalist sentiments, frequently mobilized by barangay (village) captains and local officials, while the young cast their votes based on their political ideals and the fight for the truth in the midst of the proliferation of fake narratives. One Vigan campaigner told me that 70 or 80 per cent of households he visited refused to accept Leni leaflets from him as barangay captains had allegedly been offered financial incentives to deliver a “zero-Leni” result in their localities.

Photo 2
Leni-Kiko Supporters at Kiko Rally, Vigan, 5 May 2022



Source: Duncan McCargo.

However, opinion polls during the run-up to the election suggested that support for Leni was no stronger among the under-30s than in the general population. The Leni campaign did not produce a tidal wave of support from Gen-Z, unlike, say, the Future Forward Party in Thailand's 2019 general election.⁹ Most young Philippine voters preferred Bongbong to Leni: age was not a major voting cleavage.

Some pro-Leni youth groups used the words “Mama” or “Mummy” in their names, in an apparent projection of Leni and her running mate Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan as idealized middle-class parents. The Marcos camp successfully branded Leni and Kiko with membership of a “goody-two-shoes” elite, associated with the politics of respectability. Ironically, Leni's very decency became an electoral handicap—her “disente (decent) politics” became synonymous with “dilawan politics”, referring to the “yellow” politics of liberal “virtue signalling”, which significant sections of the electorate apparently found condescending. Yellow-tagging proved far more effective than red-tagging in undermining the

Photo 3
 Leni Activists in Laoag, 6 May 2022



Source: Duncan McCargo.

Leni-Kiko tandem. At times Leni supporters made matters worse at her rallies, chanting lines such as “*hindi kami bayaran*” (we were not paid) or “*hindi kami hakot*” (we were not bused in) that implied a sense of superiority over the BBM crowds.

Following her defeat, Leni Robredo launched a new non-governmental organization (NGO) known as *Angat Buhay* to extend the pro-poor programmes she had created as vice-president and which taps on her campaign networks of youth activists, indigenous peoples, women, doctors and lawyers. Leni’s pivot to the NGO sector illustrated both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Leni-Kiko campaign which was based on an activist alliance of interest groups, rather than a conventional vote-mobilizing operation. Faced with the BBM-Sara UniTeam campaign juggernaut, focused on upbeat messaging and largely devoid of programmatic content, Leni struggled to compete.

This Roundtable examines various aspects of the 2022 Philippine elections. Three contributions examine the historical and discursive context underpinning the election. Sheila Coronel concentrates on the question of accountability, arguing that both the Marcos

family and the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte—overshadowed by his notorious drugs war—benefitted from an entrenched culture of impunity which allowed the Bongbong-Sara tandem to win electoral support despite their dubious records, lack of openness and aversion to critical scrutiny. Nicole Curato views the return of the Marcoses as evidence of a normative shift in the Philippines: no longer is democracy prized over authoritarian rule. The post-People Power order that celebrated the end of the Marcos dictatorship and valorized popular commitment to open politics is now well and truly over. The distinction between good and bad politicians has dissolved: virtue is no longer valued for its own sake. Lisandro Claudio makes a parallel argument about notions of technocratic competence: the Leni campaign continued to promote good governance as a “magic bullet”, in effect rebranding the Aquino legacy while tagging Marcos as representing a discredited politics of structural corruption. Ultimately, Leni’s efforts were insufficient to win over the electorate and secure victory.

Two contributions in this Roundtable examine social media and disinformation. Elize Mendoza examines the ways in which the Marcos campaign successfully exploited the video-clip platform TikTok: videos with pro-Marcos hashtags gained literally billions of views. Most clips were not created by the Marcos campaign itself, but by supporters: unlike other social media platforms, the TikTok algorithm enables individual app users to reach huge audiences. Most of the popular videos featured upbeat messages associated with the presidential candidate, and were largely devoid of overtly political content. TikTok promoted a singularly uncritical mode of popular engagement in the presidential campaign. In a broader overview of the role of social media in the campaign, Jonathan Ong explains how promoting the kind of positive “fervent fan participation” seen on TikTok formed one major plank of the Marcos campaign. Another key feature was the aggressive satirical takedowns of Leni, spearheaded by Imee Marcos, the elder sister of Bongbong Marcos, through her popular official YouTube channel and mimicked by her fans and allied influencers.

Finally, two co-authored pieces examine how the Marcos campaign crafted powerful and compelling messages. Arild Ruud and Cecilie Endresen draw on their ethnographic fieldwork among Marcos supporters to explore a range of popular but highly inaccurate narratives. They show how “Filipinos were not harking back to a golden past, but used both the Marcos era and its aftermath as inchoate illustrations of political, cultural and social anxieties in

contemporary society”. Talitha Espiritu and Geronimo Cristobal view the elections in terms of affective masks, in which Marcos and Robredo deployed melodrama and emotional messaging to appeal to voters by both tapping into earlier narratives and moving beyond them. Leni Robredo, they argue, was defeated by a Marcosian counter-revolution that successfully overturned the orthodoxies of the 1986 People Power movement as the finest hour of Philippine politics. That is why her 15 million votes were just not enough.

NOTES

Acknowledgments: Fieldwork for this article was supported by the grant “Popular Participation and Leadership in Asian Democracies”, funded by the Research Council of Norway (Project Number: 314849). The author would like to thank John Sidel and the contributors to this Roundtable for their invaluable feedback and comments on the various papers.

- ¹ For a detailed assessment of the elections, see Asian Network on Free Elections (ANFREL), *2022 Philippine National and Local Elections: A Vibrant Democracy amid Systemic Challenges*, August 2022, https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ANFREL_2022-Philippine-National-and-Local-Elections_ol.pdf.
- ² I am discounting Ferdinand E. Marcos’s huge “victory” in the 1981 election, which was widely seen as manipulated.
- ³ See Aries A. Arugay and Justin Keith A. Baquisal, “Mobilized and Polarized: Social Media and Disinformation Narratives in the 2022 Philippine Elections”, *Pacific Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2022): 549–73.
- ⁴ Sol Iglesias, “Violence and Impunity: Democratic Backsliding in the Philippines and the 2022 Elections”, *Pacific Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2022): 575–93.
- ⁵ See Pia Ranada, “The Lead-Up to, and Aftermath of, Moreno’s ‘Leni Withdraw’ Call”, *Rappler*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/lead-up-aftermath-isko-moreno-leni-withdraw-call/>.
- ⁶ Neil Arwin Mercado, “Pulse Asia December Survey: Marcos and Duterte-Carpio team is top choice”, *Inquirer*, 22 December 2021, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1530873/pulse-asias-december-survey-marcos-and-duterte-carpio-team-is-top-choice>.
- ⁷ See “Download na ng Leni 2022 App!”, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aOzheDJ_Do.
- ⁸ This section draws on multiple interviews with Leni activists in Baguio, Abra, Vigan and Laoag, April and May 2022.
- ⁹ See Duncan McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul, *Future Forward: The Rise and Fall of a Thai Political Party* (Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press, 2020).

Philippine Elections 2022: The End of Accountability? Impunity and the Marcos Presidency

SHEILA S. CORONEL

Elections are supposed to hold leaders to account, but in some countries they have advanced not accountability but impunity. A victory at the polls can wash away allegations of crime and corruption, allowing those accused to escape the long arm of the law.

This is not a recent phenomenon in the Philippines. For decades, politicians seeking to evade justice have pinned their hopes of exoneration on the polls. But the 2022 elections took this to a new level: it was not just impunity that won, but the normalization of that impunity—and perhaps also the end of any illusion of future accountability.

The biggest winners of the 2022 vote—Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte—are the children of strongmen who have been accused of some of the most egregious crimes ever committed by Philippine presidents. The current president's father, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., is believed to have amassed billions of dollars of ill-gotten wealth during his 20-year presidency.¹ Thousands were killed, disappeared, tortured and jailed during his rule.² The vice-president's father, the outgoing president Rodrigo Duterte, presided over a war on drugs that the police say has killed more than 6,000; human rights groups claim the death toll is likely four to five times higher.³

SHEILA S. CORONEL is Toni Stabile Professor of Professional Practice in Investigative Journalism at Columbia Journalism School, Columbia University, United States. Postal address: 2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10025, United States; email: ssc2136@columbia.edu.

By running—proudly and unapologetically—as the political heirs of their fathers, the next-generation Marcos and Duterte also made the 2022 elections a referendum on their parental legacies. Their stunning victories, therefore, have been construed as the people's verdict: forgiveness for the sins of their fathers.

Two past presidents, Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, have been similarly absolved. Both were detained for plunder—the accumulation of US\$1 million or more of ill-gotten wealth—but subsequent election victories wiped their slates clean. This cycle—wash, rinse, repeat—is familiar to Filipinos where politicians stay 30 years or more in office and political families rule for generations despite the shame and scandals that surrounded their forebears. The 2022 election was but the cycle's logical culmination.

The crimes of which the elder Marcos and Duterte have been accused are of a different order of magnitude. The prosecution of these crimes has consequences for both accountability and historical memory. Up to now, the Marcoses are still entangled in unsettled lawsuits around the world.⁴ Thirty-six years after a popular uprising ousted them from power, the long and tortuous road to reclaim the country's wealth from the family's hands—and hold responsible those who had helped them steal—has yet to be completed. A president who denies, despite a mass of documented proof, that his father looted the economy and plundered the treasury is not expected to continue the effort. Given the Marcos-Duterte alliance, the new government, like the previous one, will also likely refrain from a vigorous prosecution of police excesses in the drug war.

Even before this election, the Marcos and the Duterte families were already poster children for a broken justice system where the wealthy and the powerful are beyond the reach of the law. What is at stake in this presidential election, therefore, is not so much impunity, which both the Duterte and the Marcos families have enjoyed for decades, but the entrenchment of that impunity as a fact of political life and the likely collapse of hope that such impunity can be challenged.

Over the years, the victims of the Marcos regime, along with human rights lawyers, anti-graft investigators and well-intentioned judges, government bureaucrats and legislators, have invested time and energy in making the Marcos family pay. The system was seriously flawed, but they could count on some victories. They could also count on public—and international—support for their efforts.

No longer. Since around 2017, opinion polls have shown most Filipinos considered high inflation and low wages the most urgent

issues; fighting corruption and ensuring the fair application of the law were not deemed as salient.⁵

Internationally, the growing support for populists and autocrats worldwide has diminished the appeal and effectiveness of campaigns against corruption and for human rights. Moreover, persistent government harassment and attacks have put activists, campaigners and crusading journalists on the defensive. They have been demonized by populist leaders, attacked by troll armies and become the target of conspiracy theories and false accusations.

The toxic information space, particularly social media, has put the wringer on accountability crusades and those who take part in them. Investigative reports about corruption and abuse are drowned out; falsehoods and fake news proliferate; and crusaders are falsely tagged as criminals or communists.⁶ Citizens drowning in the disinformation deluge and unable to distinguish between fact and fiction are not likely to take action.

The Marcoses have invested heavily in revising the narrative about Marcos Sr.'s rule as part of a larger political rehabilitation project.⁷ Since the early 2010s, they have seeded social media, particularly Facebook, YouTube, and more recently, TikTok, with an alternative history of the Marcos regime. Social media influencers have portrayed that era as a Golden Age, encircling the Marcos family in a halo of what Nicole Curato calls “good vibes and toxic positivity” which denies the reality of dictatorship and “reduces critical arguments to the perpetuation of bad vibes”.⁸

Like the Marcoses, Rodrigo Duterte has made full use of both legacy and social media to ridicule democratic processes and build support for strongman rule. He also deployed the state's media resources to recast the narrative about democracy and human rights and demonize human rights workers.⁹ As disinformation scholars Jonathan Corpus Ong, Jeremy Tintiangko and Rossine Fallorina noted, Duterte has criticized human rights defenders as “criminal supporters, communist sympathizers, and conspiratorially aligned with foreign destabilizers”.¹⁰

In this context, the traditional repertoire of campaigning tactics—exposure, naming and shaming, street protests—has lost its efficacy. Both human rights groups and the legacy media in the Philippines are in survival mode. During Duterte's presidency, they were subjected to trolling, doxxing, cyberattacks, harassment suits, tax audits, and in the case of the broadcast giant, ABS-CBN, denial of a franchise. These have come on top of falling advertising revenues and declining audiences. Worldwide, there is declining

trust and interest in professionally produced news, with younger people preferring to get information from social media platforms.¹¹ Mainstream media, which saw a surge in prestige and influence after the fall of Marcos, has never been weaker than it is today.

State accountability institutions are similarly infirm. Successive presidents have politicized and weakened independent constitutional commissions and stacked the judiciary, including the Supreme Court, with loyal appointees. Marcos Jr. will not be any different. His appointment of staunch ally Jesus Crispin Remulla as justice secretary signals not a crusade against the abuses of power but a muscular approach against those demanding accountability. As a member of Congress, Remulla had lashed out against critical journalists, led the attack against the ABS-CBN franchise and accused opposition supporters of being communists.¹²

Not too long ago, there was a recognition that activism, public interest lawyering, watchdog reporting, congressional and judicial oversight and the assertion of state authority against vested interests are part of the democratic process. This broad consensus, including by elites, managed to rein in some abuses of power and made possible significant gains, including the recovery of Marcos funds in Swiss bank accounts and the allocation of a big portion of it to compensate victims of the martial law regime.¹³

This consensus, however, has been eroded by the Duterte government's sustained attacks on civil society, the news media and the political opposition. Efforts to undermine the credibility of those seeking accountability, which included the hounding and jailing of Senator Leila de Lima,¹⁴ helped soften the ground for public and elite acquiescence to both the carnage of the drug war and the Marcos restoration.

Marcos Jr. has assumed the presidency when domestic and international factors and new arenas of public discourse have narrowed the avenues for accountability. Weak institutions and a weak opposition, clobbered in the last polls, can provide only symbolic oversight. Now that they are back in power, the Marcos family and their allies will undoubtedly advance the historical revisionism of the Marcos era,¹⁵ using state agencies and public resources to erase the sins of the past. All these signal a perfect storm for impunity.

Through the years, the Marcos family has resorted to myth-making in order to explain the origins of their fabulous wealth. In the 1990s, Imelda Marcos said her husband became rich because

he had found the treasure supposedly looted from Southeast Asia by World War II General Tomiyuki Yamashita, who commanded the Japanese troops in northern Luzon. In recent years, Philippine social media has been awash with the myth of the Tallano gold—that Ferdinand Sr. had been entrusted with thousands of tonnes of gold by a Philippine royal family who were his clients and that Ferdinand Jr., once president, would share the wealth with Filipinos.¹⁶

The truth is more mundane. Documents, many of them retrieved from the presidential palace after the Marcoses fled the country in 1986, attest to how Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos funnelled public funds, including Japanese World War II reparation payments, to Swiss bank accounts, Liechtenstein foundations and shell companies in Panama and other offshore havens.

No member of the Marcos family has admitted to any wrongdoing. They have instead spent nearly 40 years fighting cases that would have them forfeit their assets. They have also left a trail of unpaid court judgements, most notably the US\$2 billion awarded by a court in Hawaii in 1995 to some 10,000 human rights victims of the Marcos regime. In addition, the Marcos family is also still on the hook for some US\$4 billion in unpaid taxes on Ferdinand Sr.'s estate.¹⁷ Those hoping that the Marcos family would share their wealth are bound to be disappointed.

In 1986, the Swiss government froze the Marcos bank accounts, setting a precedent that has since been used in wealth recovery efforts by other countries. But Swiss authorities said they would release the funds only if Imelda were convicted in a Philippine court.¹⁸ In 1991, she was allowed to return to the Philippines so that she could be tried; the following year, she ran for president. She got just 10 per cent of the votes, but it was the start of the family's political rehabilitation.

It took 21 years to convict Imelda of a criminal charge. She fought the case tooth and nail even as she and her children were elected to local and national positions. In 2018, she was found guilty of seven counts of graft and sentenced to a maximum of 42 years in prison, but has not spent a single day in jail.¹⁹ Now 92 years old, she is out on bail on humanitarian grounds while her case is on appeal at the Supreme Court.

Imelda's earlier conviction on civil charges, however, paved the way for the return of some US\$680 million to the Philippines, of which US\$200 million was paid as reparations to Marcos' human

rights victims. More than 11,000 people have received payment, and the interest from the fund has been allocated to a museum memorializing human rights victims.²⁰

Despite its many problems, the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG), created in 1986 for the sole purpose of recovering the Marcos family's wealth, has filed over 180 corruption and even more civil cases.²¹ It has recovered some US\$3.4 billion worth of Marcos assets and is litigating another US\$2.5 billion.²²

Just two years ago, lawyer Ruben Carranza wrote optimistically about the country's efforts. "The Philippines' example", he said, "shows how corruption-focused truth-seeking, a dedicated asset recovery agency, and making funding for reparation and memorialization a priority for recovered assets can move both accountability for corruption and justice for victims forward".²³

To Carranza, the well-publicized wealth recovery effort, including the testimonies and documents presented in the court cases, was important not just for litigation but also for public truth-telling. The thievery and brutality of the Marcos era are now on the public record. But with another Marcos in the presidential palace with a resounding mandate and a narrative of his family's innocence, it is a challenging time for truth-telling.

Accountability institutions already besieged during six years of Duterte's rule will likely continue to be further emasculated in the next six years of a Marcos presidency. Unless there is a backlash from a public weary of autocracy, the country will be in a long cycle of unaccountable, even if popularly elected, power.

NOTES

¹ Jovito R. Salonga, *Presidential Plunder: The Quest for the Marcos Ill-Gotten Wealth* (Quezon City, The Philippines: University of the Philippines Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy, 2000).

² "Five Things to Know About Martial Law in the Philippines", Amnesty International, 25 April 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/five-things-to-know-about-martial-law-in-the-philippines/>.

³ "How Many People Have Been Killed in Duterte's War on Drugs?", *The Economist*, 22 November 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/11/22/how-many-people-have-been-killed-in-rodrico-dutertes-war-on-drugs>.

⁴ Andreo Calonzo, "Country Chased Dictator's Billions for Years. Now His Son Could End Up in Charge", Bloomberg, 5 May 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-05-05/how-philippines-s-marcos-presidency-could-shelve-billion-dollar-court-battles?leadSource=uverify%20wall>.

- ⁵ Pulse Asia, “September 2021 Nationwide Survey on Urgent Concerns and the Performance Ratings of the National Administration on Selected Issues”, (undated) <https://www.pulseasia.ph/september-2021-nationwide-survey-on-urgent-concerns-and-the-performance-ratings-of-the-national-administration-on-selected-issues/>.
- ⁶ See for example “Targeting the Messenger: Investigative Journalists Under Extreme Pressure”, Index on Censorship, January 2019, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/index-report-corruption-webv5.pdf>; and “Situation of Human Rights in the Philippines: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights”, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3879531?ln=en>.
- ⁷ Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes, *Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scene of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines* (Leicester, UK: Newton Tech4Dev Network, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7275/2cq4-5396>.
- ⁸ Nicole Curato, “The Philippines: Erasing History through Good Vibes and Toxic Positivity”, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Southeast Asia, 28 March 2022, <https://th.boell.org/en/2022/03/28/philippines-good-vibes-toxic-positivity>.
- ⁹ Loreben Toquero, “Duterte ‘Institutionalized’ Disinformation, Paved the Way for a Marcos Victory”, *Rappler*, 19 June 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-institutionalized-disinformation-paved-way-marcos-jr-victory-2022/>.
- ¹⁰ Jonathan Corpus Ong, Jeremy Tintiango and Rossine Fallorina, *Human Rights in Survival Mode: Rebuilding Trust and Supporting Digital Workers in the Philippines* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Kennedy School, 2021), <https://mediamanipulation.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Human-Rights-in-Survival-Mode.pdf>, p. 14.
- ¹¹ *2022 Digital News Report* (Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, 2022), https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf.
- ¹² Lian Buan, “Boying Remulla is Marcos’ Justice Secretary”, *Rappler*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/boying-remulla-marcos-jr-department-justice-secretary/>.
- ¹³ Ruben Carranza, “Transitional Justice, Corruption, and Mutually Reinforcing Accountability: What the Global South Can Learn from the Philippines”, in *Economic Actors and the Limits of Transitional Justice: Truth and Justice for Business Complicity in Human Rights Violations*, edited by Leigh A. Payne, Laura Bernal-Bermudez and Gabriel Pereira, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 241 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 236–64.
- ¹⁴ Vince Ferreras, “Timeline: De Lima’s Five-Year Struggle in Prison”, CNN Philippines, 16 May 2021, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/3/16/TIMELINE-Leila-De-Lima-arrest-prison-.html>.
- ¹⁵ Macon Ramos-Araneta, “Imee: No History Revision, Only To Tell Our Side of the Story”, *Manila Standard*, 2 June 2022, <https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314232996/imee-no-history-revision-only-to-tell-our-side-of-story.html>.
- ¹⁶ Lian Buan, “If Marcos Never Saw Gold, Why Tell Court Gold Was Their Source of Wealth?”, *Rappler*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/ferdinand-bongbong-marcos-jr-never-saw-gold-told-court-source-wealth/>.

- ¹⁷ See Norman Aquino and Kyle Atienza, “PCGG: Tax Cases vs Marcoses Resolved Long Ago”, *BusinessWorld*, 15 March 2022, <https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2022/03/15/436215/pcgg-tax-cases-vs-marcoses-resolved-long-ago/>.
- ¹⁸ “Aquino May Let Imelda Marcos Return, But She’ll Face Charges”, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1991, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-03-22-mn-637-story.html>.
- ¹⁹ “Imelda Marcos Convicted of Graft, Sentenced to Prison”, *NBC News*, 9 November 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/imelda-marcos-convicted-graft-sentenced-prison-n934356>.
- ²⁰ Human Rights Victims Compensation Board, <https://hrvmmemcom.gov.ph/>.
- ²¹ Carranza, “Transitional Justice, Corruption, and Mutually Reinforcing Accountability”, p. 248.
- ²² Glee Jalea, “Ex-PCGG Chair: At Least \$6B Worth of Marcos Assets Still Unretrieved”, *CNN Philippines*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2022/3/24/Marcos-ill-gotten-wealth-unretrieved-6-billion-dollars.html>.
- ²³ Carranza, “Transitional Justice, Corruption, and Mutually Reinforcing Accountability”, p. 252.

Philippine Elections 2022: The New Normative Order

NICOLE CURATO

For decades, Philippine politics was organized around a normative order that prized democracy over authoritarian rule. A normative order, as it is commonly used in sociology, refers to the shared beliefs about what people can and cannot do in public life. People who transgress the normative order are stigmatized for poor behaviour or even punished for disrupting social order. In politics, a normative order dictates the nation's values and aspirations. It distinguishes good from bad politicians. It draws a line between virtuous citizens and the vile.

The Philippine's democracy-centric normative order is most pronounced in stories we were told about the EDSA People Power Revolution. In 1986, a mass uprising ousted President Ferdinand Marcos from power after more than 20 years in power. The protest along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue—known colloquially as EDSA—paved the way for the restoration of liberal democracy. In February 2022, on the 36th anniversary of the revolution, Senate President Vicente Sotto III described People Power as the “symbol of courage and unity, a light of truth that gives us a sense of freedom”.¹ Vice President and opposition leader Leni Robredo called it “a story of love”.² She spoke of the young and old who came together in peace, of kneeling nuns and soldiers who wept as rosaries were hung on the barrels of their guns. Even then President Rodrigo

NICOLE CURATO is Professor of Political Sociology at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra. Postal address: 11 Kirinari Street, Canberra, ACT 2617, Australia; email: Nicole.Curato@canberra.edu.au.

Duterte, who rarely disguised his contempt for democratic rituals, still found it necessary to pay tribute to those who “fought to uphold democracy”. “Let us honour and thank those who continue to keep alive the legacy of this largely peaceful and non-violent revolution”, he said.³

These statements, among many others, form the moral arc of the nation’s post-EDSA normative order. While the Philippines has an uneven track record of defending human rights, upholding press freedom and electing morally upright politicians, the aspiration to defend freedom against tyranny was a largely uncontested ideal. Institutions like the anti-graft court (the *Sandiganbayan*) as well as constitutional provisions on term limits are manifestations of a normative order that seeks to protect the nation from the abuse of political power. These reforms are far from perfect, but they were put in place as safeguards to prevent the return of dictatorship.

This normative order was, however, upended less than three months after the 2022 anniversary of the People Power Revolution. On 9 May 2022, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte were elected into Malacañang Palace. The decisive victory of the Marcos-Duterte tandem signals the complete breakdown of the moral arc that gave meaning to the Philippines’ contemporary democracy.

The breakdown did not happen overnight. Duterte was able to maintain a “very good” public satisfaction rating throughout his six-year tenure, demonstrating that it is possible for a Philippine commander-in-chief to condone human rights violations of genocidal proportions at no political cost.⁴ Terror was present in the lives of families who experienced police brutality during Duterte’s drug war, but, for others, that same terror brought them freedom from drug-related violence. The Philippines entered a new social contract under Duterte’s Hobbesian world, where people’s freedoms depended on the President’s right to take them away.⁵

The People Power normative order was further corroded by President Duterte’s endorsement for Ferdinand Marcos Sr to be buried at the National Heroes Cemetery, where plots are reserved for soldiers, patriots and former presidents. Duterte’s presidential endorsement officially shifted the nation’s moral discourse of freedom from tyranny to forgiveness and unity. Many responded to Duterte’s call for national healing, despite protests from students and civil society groups. The Marcos family may have been the political “other” in the People Power normative order, but they were no longer pariahs. In 2019, Imee Marcos—the daughter of

the late dictator—won a senatorial seat as a candidate in Duterte’s slate, the same seat that her brother Bongbong held before he lost the vice presidential race in 2016. Bongbong and Imee’s elections to the Senate confirmed that the Marcoses’ political power was no longer confined to their various bailiwicks. It sent a message to politicians that an alliance with the Marcos family is now an advantage, not a liability.

These developments lead us to ask the following questions: Where does the breakdown of the People Power normative order leave the Philippines? What normative order is being constructed as the Marcos-Duterte alliance rules the country?

There are two ways to answer these questions. The first is to examine the tactics that the Duterte and Marcos regimes used in their election campaigns. International news coverage as well as investigative reports suggest that the new normative order is based on lies and deception spread through social media.⁶ It conforms to what John Keane describes as “new despotism”, in which the country is run by “masters of deception and seduction”, who, through electoral victories and “slick means”, are able to win over the loyalty of the middle classes, the urban poor and rural communities.⁷

The result is a citizenry unable to tell the truth from lies, and therefore a citizenry with a compromised political agency. Good citizens of the Marcos-Duterte regime are docile yet enthusiastic political subjects. They look away from atrocities. They applaud the building of hospitals, airports and expressways, but refuse to condemn the government for incompetence. They choose instead to blame other factors—such as the political opposition which they accuse of destabilizing the government, for example, or external shocks to the economic system—because to blame the government is to be unpatriotic. The new normative order still claims to defend democracy by invoking the will of (the majority of) the people, but it is averse to contestation and calls for accountability. It is a kind of democracy where citizens defend their freedom of speech but block public deliberation. Critics are told to “shut up” and “respect my opinion”.⁸

The second way of answering these questions is to ground our insights on the political justifications of citizens who voted for Marcos and Duterte. Here, I draw from my fieldwork over eight years (on and off from 2014 to 2022) in Tacloban City, the hometown of former first lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos.⁹ Over the course of my research, I have gained insights into how urban

poor communities construct an alternative normative order outside the legacies of People Power. Many Taclobanons feel that their city fell out of favour after the revolution. Tacloban was showered with bounty during the Marcos regime. It was gifted the 2.16 km San Juanico Bridge, which was called the “bridge of love” to signify Marcos Sr.’s love for his wife Imelda. Tacloban was the site of one of the Marcoses’ presidential summer homes, which housed Ming Dynasty vases, European paintings and Czech chandeliers. It was a city known for spectacular street parties to celebrate the feast of the Santo Niño. The pristine beaches of the province of Leyte, where Tacloban is the capital, were a vacation destination for foreign dignitaries and high-profile guests. During Marcos Sr.’s rule, Tacloban was the golden city, and Imelda was its queen.

From being the home of architectural wonders and the site of spectacular feasts, post-revolution Tacloban featured in the national headlines because of the mega-typhoons and deadly landslides which battered the city. It is this context that shaped the way Tacloban citizens formed their alternative normative order. For long-time Marcos supporters, the ethos of politics is not defined by People Power’s discourse of freedom and good governance, but the ethos of care. “The Marcoses have been good to us” was a statement I heard often during my interviews. The Marcos family, said Tacloban’s residents, never forgot Tacloban. They came home often, spent time with the people and shared their blessings. Critics might dismiss this as nothing more than patronage politics. My research participants, however, see their relationship with the Marcoses as far more than merely a transaction of votes in exchange for largesse, an accusation they find insulting.

“The Romualdezes are stingy this time around”, said one of my research participants in May 2022. The Romualdezes are Imelda’s relatives who were then running for re-election in various positions in Tacloban. He showed me a sample ballot containing six names in bold letters: three Romualdezes running for local positions, Bongbong Marcos, Sara Duterte and a party list group. Enclosed in the sample ballot were a few hundred pesos. “If you divide the money they gave us [by six], then the [local] opposition gave us more”, he told me. We joked about the “vote buying [*badil*] value pack”. Maybe the Romualdez-Marcos clan was tightening their belts because so many of them were running for office at the same time. A man eavesdropping on our conversation interrupted, scoffing at campaign managers for thinking they could outsmart voters. “They thought we wouldn’t notice”, the man said. It did not matter to

my respondent and his family. They remained convinced that the Romualdez-Marcos clan deserved to win, even if their local opponents handed out more cash. They saw their votes as the outcome of a moral calculation. They need to be good to the family who had been kind to them, even when that family had sometimes failed. My respondents, by and large, were confident of their moral rightness.

These observations are not unique to Tacloban and the Marcoses. Ethnographers Marco Garrido and Wataru Kusaka observed similar politics of justification in their work among communities that supported the populist Philippine President Joseph Estrada.¹⁰ Like Ferdinand Marcos Sr., Estrada was forced out of power by a mass uprising in 2001 because of corruption scandals. His ouster was justified based on his transgressions of the normative order that prizes moral uprightness of politicians and good governance. To date, however, Estrada continues to command a loyal following. His supporters see him as a leader who forged sincere relationships with stigmatized groups like the urban poor, enabling them to assert their dignity amid inequality. I observed the same justifications in my work on “populist publics” who supported Rodrigo Duterte.¹¹ My research participants perceived Duterte as a man who laid bare their latent anxieties and gave voice to their unspeakable anguish. Unlike Estrada, however, Duterte was able to finish his term, without any serious threats to his power from the defenders of the People Power normative order.

Viewed this way, the post-EDSA normative order bestows esteem and recognition to once stigmatized populations—people who were dismissed as naïve, stupid and immoral—who now constitute the majority. Sara Duterte, who was then the Davao City mayor, gave voice to this emerging normative order back in 2017. “You preach about freedom as if you invented it”, she said, responding to an archbishop who accused her father of “defacing” the legacy of the revolution. “Let me tell you what freedom is”, she added. “It is to live a life that is free from your selective moral standard.” Her response to the archbishop may seem like an outburst from a daughter defending the policies of her father, but it points to a conversation that began long before the 2022 elections. Freedom means many things to Filipinos, and that includes the freedom to bring back the Marcos family that the people had overthrown more than three decades ago.

In my fieldwork two weeks before the May 2022 elections, I found it striking that people’s support for the Marcos-Duterte tandem has reached the level of common sense. “BBM, *siyempre*”

(“Bongbong Marcos, of course”) was a common response I heard not only from the research participants I interviewed, but also from my casual conversations with vendors, motorcycle drivers, hairstylists and even senior high school students. The operative term is “of course”. People openly expressed their support for Marcos and Duterte as if the other candidates vying for office did not enter into their consideration, as if the answer to my question about who they are voting for on 9 May was so obvious. There was no hesitation in their response, except in instances when people I met for the first time checked if I was working for “the other side” (i.e., Vice President Leni Robredo’s campaign). “Everyone here knows the Marcoses are good people”, one of my respondents said, “there are just those who keep bringing them down”. At that point, it was clear to me that the People Power normative order has come to an end, no matter how hard the political opposition fought. That the Marcos family will return to the Malacañang Palace is a fact that was known to many for a long time, and those who tried to prevent their return were seen to have been stuck in a bygone era.

The precise contour of the emerging normative order remains to be seen. Activists, opposition leaders and citizens who seek to challenge the Marcos-Duterte alliance are faced with the task of offering an alternative political project that speaks to the aspirations of citizens who felt abandoned by the post-EDSA democracy. However, despite worries of political polarization, one critical insight I will not forget from my fieldwork is that Filipinos, under certain conditions, are still open to being persuaded by good reason, despite what the majority thinks.

Two days before the elections, one of my key informants in Tacloban forwarded a message to me on Facebook Messenger. It was a digital poster for “*Taclaban: The Finale*”—*Taclaban* being a portmanteau of Tacloban and “*laban*” (fight). The poster promoted a watch party for Leni Robredo’s *Miting de Avance* (final rally). “Are you going?” I asked her. “Yes, we’re going”, she said.

“I didn’t realise you’re voting for Leni”, I texted back. “Yes, I am [followed by three pink emoji flowers signifying support for Leni]”, she said, “[I] dared to be different”.

NOTES

Acknowledgments: Fieldwork for this article was made possible by the grant “Popular Participation and Leadership in Asian Democracies”, funded by the Research Council of Norway (Project Number: 314849). This piece is completed with research support from Ferdinand Sanchez II.

- ¹ See Christia Marie Ramos, “Edsa People Power: ‘Preserve Flame’ of PH’s ‘Greatest Victory over Dark Times,’ says Sotto”, *Inquirer.net*, 24 February 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1559135/edsa-people-power-preserve-flame-of-phs-greatest-victory-over-dark-times-says-sotto>.
- ² Christia Marie Ramos, “Robredo: Spirit of Edsa People Power Goes Beyond Surnames”, *Inquirer.net*, 25 February 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1559820/robredo-spirit-of-edsa-people-power-goes-beyond-surnames>.
- ³ Catherine Gonzales, “Duterte to Filipinos: Honor those who keep the Edsa People Power legacy alive”, *Inquirer.net*, 25 February 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1559827/fwd-duterte-urges-filipinos-to-honor-those-who-keep-the-keep-the-edsa-people-power-legacy-alive>.
- ⁴ Dahlia Simangan, “Is the Philippine ‘War on Drugs’ an Act of Genocide?”, *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 1 (2018): 68–89.
- ⁵ Vincente L. Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2022), p. 58.
- ⁶ Regine Cabato and Shibani Mahtani, “How the Philippines’ Brutal History is Being Whitewashed for Voters”, *Washington Post*, 12 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/12/philippines-marcos-memory-election/>.
- ⁷ John Keane, *The New Despotism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 14.
- ⁸ “Respect my opinion” was a go-to phrase of Marcos supporters on social media who refused to engage with debates about the Marcos family’s ill-gotten wealth and Martial Law atrocities. See Nicole Curato, “The Philippines: Erasing History through Good Vibes and Toxic Positivity”, *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Southeast Asia*, 28 March 2022, <https://th.boell.org/en/2022/03/28/philippines-good-vibes-toxic-positivity>.
- ⁹ Nicole Curato, *Democracy in a Time of Misery: From Spectacular Tragedy to Deliberative Action* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- ¹⁰ Marco Garrido, “Why the Poor Support Populism: The Politics of Sincerity in Metro Manila”, *American Journal of Sociology* 123, no. 3 (2017): 647–85; and Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy and the Urban Poor* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017).
- ¹¹ Curato, *Democracy in a Time of Misery*.

Philippine Elections 2022: The End of the Good Governance Discourse

LISANDRO E. CLAUDIO

Ferdinand Marcos Sr. looted the Philippines' national treasury. In 2003, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that at least 25 billion pesos (US\$500 million) of his personal wealth was ill-gotten. It was a sum disproportionate to Marcos' and his wife's incomes as public officials.¹ A common estimate for the total amount stolen by the Marcos family is US\$10 billion.²

However, many of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s supporters have ceased to care about good governance. Anecdotes and initial ethnographic research reveal a cynical attitude—that distinguishing between dirty and clean politicians is a futile endeavour since all of them are corrupt—has taken hold among Marcos Jr's voters.³ They were under no illusion that he was a candidate of good governance, with only eight per cent of them saying that they chose him because he had a clean record.⁴ However, as one Marcos Jr. supporter told an Australian news outlet, corruption is no longer a concern for them because, unlike the 1980s, “there are safeguards now”.⁵

A major reason for Marcos Jr.'s victory is therefore the fact that the discourse of good governance advanced by the opposition has failed to appeal to voters outside its traditional reformist base. This essay explains why this discourse failed in 2022. It also discusses the inadequacies of the good governance discourse as a

LISANDRO E. CLAUDIO is Associate Professor in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Postal address: 355B Dwinelle Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, United States; email: lclaudio@berkeley.edu.

campaign strategy and as a lens for analysing Philippine political developments.

We should, however, first dispense with the idea that the disregard for the Marcos family's perfidy is simply a result of historical amnesia and/or organized disinformation. This, of course, played a role in the 2022 elections, but focusing only on disinformation distracts us from recognizing changes in electoral attitudes.

Although Marcos Jr.'s supporters were aware of the family's corruption, they continued to support him. However, this was not always the case. In 2010, then Senator Benigno Aquino III ran on a platform of "*kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap*" ("If no one is corrupt, then no one is poor"). Aquino's message resonated well with the voters because he was running at the end of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency, a highly unpopular regime plagued by multiple corruption scandals. Of those who supported Aquino, 46 per cent thought he was not corrupt and 15 per cent thought he cared for the poor. As for the electorate in general, the major reasons for selecting a candidate were the belief that a candidate was not corrupt (26 per cent) and the belief that a candidate cared for the poor (26 per cent).

Even Rodrigo Duterte, in his 2016 presidential campaign, foregrounded corruption as an issue, which he saw as a form of "criminality" alongside the spread of illegal drugs. He rightly observed that the drug problem was tied to the large corrupt networks among the police and politicians. The top two reasons motivating voters to choose Duterte were the perception of him not being corrupt (20 per cent) and the belief that he had done/was doing/would do something for the country (20 per cent).

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. also claimed to be against corruption, but the issue was ultimately unimportant. His intentionally vague campaign focused on a future of national redemption and prosperity achieved through "unity". Marcos Jr.'s voters picked him because they believed he was capable of doing something (20 per cent), knew much about the running of a government (16 per cent), could grow the economy and improve livelihoods (13 per cent) and cared for the poor (11 per cent). The idea that one could admire a Marcos despite his or her widespread corruption allegations is not new. In 1986, shortly after Marcos Sr. had been deposed, 69 per cent of Filipinos regarded him as a brave president even when 51 per cent believed that he was a thief who stole from the country.⁶

Contesting Marcos Jr. in 2022 was the incumbent Vice President Leni Robredo, who ran on a platform of good governance. Many

voters were inspired by the campaign, with Robredo's mammoth rallies revealing a potential democratic base that may oppose authoritarian consolidation in the future. Robredo herself was an ideal candidate for a good governance campaign, given her untarnished record. Yet she lost decisively. In retrospect, this loss was unsurprising; Robredo was against the most formidable coalition of political power in recent memory—a coalition that included the Marcos family, the Dutertes, former presidents Arroyo and Joseph Estrada, and the Villar family (a political family that also runs an ever-expanding real estate empire). Robredo's total vote would have been enough to win the last two elections, but she was against an unstoppable juggernaut. As a result, a groundswell of popular support for Robredo was not enough while her reliance on the tired narratives of good governance did not help.

In a sense, Robredo sought to transcend the Aquino legacy. Despite being Aquino's successor as chair of the Liberal Party, she ran as an independent. Instead of donning Aquino's yellow, she led what became known as a pink movement. The core message of the campaign, however, remained the same. Robredo's campaign tagline "*sa gobyernong tapat, angat buhay lahat*" ("In an honest government, quality of life improves for all") was a recast of "*kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap*". For Robredo, as well as Aquino, a clean government creates prosperity and reduces poverty. Although 36 per cent of the voters supported her because they believed she had a clean record, it was insufficient for her to win the election. That said, Filipinos still generally care about corruption, albeit less than before. For the overall electorate in 2022, the top two reasons for selecting a candidate were the belief that they could do something (18 per cent) and the perception of them having a clean record (17 per cent). Focus group discussions have shown, however, that Filipinos think of good governance as the reduction of the petty corruption that pesters them daily, like having to bribe government officials for everyday services.⁷ They are not thinking about national politicians getting massive kickbacks or government deals ridden with conflicts of interest.

For some middle-class, reform-minded Filipino voters who believe that underdevelopment is caused by corrupt politicians, the public's general disregard for large-scale corruption is evidence of an ill-informed electorate. For example, a pro-Robredo columnist describes Marcos Jr.'s supporters as "misinformed voters" who do not know that it was the "plunder and corruption under the Marcos

martial law regime that bred poverty on the whole”.⁸ A more sophisticated section of this reformist base, informed by academic and NGO literature on “strong institutions”, believes that corruption and dynastic rent-seeking have led to a poorly run and inefficient economy. A vote for corrupt politicians, therefore, condemns the Philippines to penury. But is the electorate completely wrong when they believe that corruption is not the most serious impediment to economic development?

Institutional economist Ha Joon Chang has consistently argued that strong institutions are often the products of economic growth, not the other way round.⁹ He notes, for instance, that it requires money to fund the institutions that control corruption and rent-seeking behaviours; East Asian developmental states, and even the United States during the Progressive Era, strengthened political institutions only after their economies grew. Those who reduce economic development to strong institutions also have to grapple with China’s rapid rise amid widespread state looting and rent-seeking.¹⁰

Does the pro-Marcos electorate, however misguided, see something the reformist middle class does not? Caroline Hau demonstrates that it is possible to condemn the perfidy and violence of the Marcos regime even as we concede that many of its developmentalist programmes were “politically rational moves to simultaneously court votes while pursuing national development objectives”.¹¹ Naturally, the average Marcos voter does not defend their choice by invoking the rhetoric of developmentalism (although in his TikTok videos, Ferdinand Marcos III, a grandson of Marcos Sr., referenced the developmental state as something that his grandfather was supposedly building). But their desire for politicians to “do something” (“*may gawin*”) and to project the will to get things done instead of relying on a clean track record hints that Filipinos want more than promises of good governance. As Nicole Curato argues, for “populist publics”, the “performance of compassion is enacted, not spoken”.¹²

The present disillusionment with good governance discourse can be traced back to the 2010–16 term of the second President Aquino, when, like in Thailand, a “yellow” narrative of good governance was pit against “red” populist narratives that made direct appeals to the poor.¹³ The promise of a “*daang matuwid*” (“straight path”) was always hard to fulfill. Although Aquino himself was unblemished, any remotely corrupt practices of those around him could be used to accuse the president of hypocrisy. For example, a 2015 scandal in

which airport officials planted bullets in the suitcases of passengers to extort money made frustration with petty corruption more acute. It did not help that President Aquino dismissed the incident as a minor and isolated one.

Aquino's anti-corruption efforts and political vendettas were also difficult to distinguish. As Mark Thompson contends, the prosecutions of rival politicians during Aquino's term of office gave "rise to suspicions that his calls for good governance were little more than an excuse to go after opponents". Meanwhile, "public-private partnerships languished, public transportation was neglected, and traffic worsened."¹⁴

Sclerotic infrastructure spending was, in fact, related to anti-corruption initiatives. The Aquino administration promoted commendable efforts like "bottom-up-budgeting", which gave grassroots groups a say in the allocation of local funds, and it introduced more rigorous bidding processes for government projects. Yet, strengthened oversight led to glacial spending. Upon taking office, Duterte's budget secretary accused the previous administration of underspending one trillion pesos (roughly US\$20 billion at the time), leading to lost jobs and delayed infrastructure projects.¹⁵ Aquino's own budget secretary quibbled with the figure (without providing his own), but ultimately resorted to semantics, claiming the problem was "delayed spending by agencies, not underspending".¹⁶

The Duterte administration's own hypocrisy was revealed when it also underspent during the pandemic, leading to the worst economic downturn since 1945. Still, both Duterte and Marcos Jr. foreground bold spending in their rhetoric, particularly in infrastructure development. Though Marcos' economic programme during the campaign was vague, he traded on the reputation of his father as a big spender and promised to continue Duterte's policy of "Build, Build, Build". Meanwhile, Robredo continued to rely on good governance as a magic bullet that would solve unemployment. The first prong of her job creating plan was to "renew trust in government" ("*ibalik ang tiwala sa gobyerno*"). For Robredo, stimulus was not a function of bold fiscal policies, it was a matter of trust: "If there is confidence in leadership, investments will come in" ("*Kung may kumpiyansa sa pamumuno, papasok ang puhunan*").¹⁷ This was a passive stance that contrasted with Marcos' promises of bold intervention. It was also out of touch, coming at a time when uncritical belief in markets no longer holds sway. Can we blame voters for thinking there is more to governance than simply cleaning things up?

None of this should be read as a defence of Marcos or of corruption. My point is to show that the opposition can no longer organize around ideas of good governance and should instead present a more substantial vision for national prosperity. Robredo did highlight her commitment to social services aimed at the poor. Such a commitment to a broad social democratic agenda—one that foregrounds social justice amid massive inequality—should remain part of the opposition’s vision, as this distinguishes it from the developmentalist fantasies of the Marcos political clan. But this agenda must also be supplemented by a vision for Filipino economic greatness and prosperity. This vision may be hard to imagine, and it is a vision that will need time and effort to develop. But economic greatness is a hope of a great many Filipinos. It is a hope that the opposition should share, promote and help materialize.

NOTES

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Carol Hau, Jojo Abinales, Ronnie Holmes, Duncan McCargo and the anonymous reviewer for their critical feedback.

- ¹ “Ill-Gotten Wealth Recognized by the Philippine Supreme Court”, Human Rights Violations Victims’ Memorial Commission, 15 July 2021, <https://hrvmmemcom.gov.ph/ill-gotten-wealth-recognized-by-the-philippine-supreme-court-2/>.
- ² Nick Davies, “The \$10bn Question: What Happened to the Marcos Millions?”, *The Guardian*, 7 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/07/10bn-dollar-question-marcos-millions-nick-davies>.
- ³ See Nicole Curato’s contribution to this Roundtable.
- ⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all survey data are from the archives of Pulse Asia for the election years 2010, 2016 and 2022.
- ⁵ Bill Birtles and Mitch Woolnough, “Philippines Voters Unconcerned about Historical Corruption Look Set to Deliver Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr a Landslide Win”, *ABC News*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-11/how-ferdinand-marcos-jr-pulled-off-philippines-election-victory/101049096>.
- ⁶ Felipe B. Miranda, “The May 1986 Public Opinion Report: A Political Analysis”, in *The Public Opinion Report of 1986*, edited by Mahar Mangahas and Felipe B. Miranda (Quezon City, The Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University and Social Weather Stations, 1986), p. 31.
- ⁷ “Ambisyon Natin 2040: Highlights of the National Survey on the Aspirations of the Filipino People”, National Economic and Development Authority, 2016, <https://2040.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AmbisyonHighlightsBrochure-rev2.pdf>.
- ⁸ Pit M. Maliksi, “Guiding the Youth to See Through Corruption and Deception”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 1 April 2022, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/151676/guiding-the-youth-to-see-through-corruption-and-deception>.

- ⁹ Ha Joon Chang, “Are Some Countries Destined for Under-Development”, Lecture at the University of Manchester Global Development Institute, 6 February 2018, <http://blog.gdi.manchester.ac.uk/gdi-lecture-series-ha-joon-chang/>; Ha Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London, UK: Anthem Press, 2003), pp. 78–79.
- ¹⁰ Yuen Yuen Ang, *China’s Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- ¹¹ Caroline Hau, *Elites and Ilustrados in Philippine Culture* (Quezon City, The Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), p. 203.
- ¹² Nicole Curato, *Democracy in a Time of Misery: From Spectacular Tragedies to Deliberative Action* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 128.
- ¹³ Julio C. Teehankee, “Was Duterte’s Rise Inevitable?”, in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*, edited by Nicole Curato (Quezon City, The Philippines: Bughaw, 2017), p. 50.
- ¹⁴ Mark Thompson, “The Specter of Neo-Authoritarianism in the Philippines”, *Current History* 115, no. 782 (2016): 220.
- ¹⁵ “Aquino Regime Underspent P1T”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 August 2016, <https://business.inquirer.net/213957/aquino-regime-underspent-p1t>.
- ¹⁶ Ben O. de Vera, “Ex-Budget Chief Abad Denies Aquino Admin Underspent P1 Trillion”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 August 2016, <https://business.inquirer.net/213983/ex-budget-chief-abad-denies-aquino-admin-underspent-p1-trillion>.
- ¹⁷ *Plano Ni VP Leni Robredo: Hanapbuhay Para Sa Lahat* [VP Leni’s Plan: Jobs for All] 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCPUrI0PD7Y>.

Philippine Elections 2022: TikTok in Bongbong Marcos' Presidential Campaign

MARIA ELIZE H. MENDOZA

How did a Chinese video app famous for dance routines and food trends help swing a Philippine election? Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., the son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., led all pre-election surveys for the May 2022 presidential elections by a wide margin, and ultimately won almost 59 per cent of the vote, making him the first president to win an election with a majority under the 1987 Constitution. Apart from his pitch for national unity, Marcos Jr.’s campaign featured the glorification of his father’s legacy. In the years leading to the 2022 elections, Marcos Jr. heavily invested in establishing his presence on social media, and his efforts were not limited to the same old platforms that he relied on in his 2016 vice presidential run.

In 2019, the media outlet Rappler published a three-part study on “networked propaganda” featuring the rise and spread of pro-Marcos pages and channels on Facebook and YouTube.¹ These pages and channels have primarily engaged in promoting the Marcos family and spreading disinformation by distorting the historical narratives about the dictatorship of Marcos Sr. According to Rappler’s investigation, the false narratives propagated by these pages include denials about the corruption and human rights abuses under Marcos Sr.’s regime and exaggerating the late dictator’s achievements, especially with inflated accounts of his infrastructure projects.

MARIA ELIZE H. MENDOZA is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Postal address: University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1001 Philippines; email: mhmendoza@up.edu.ph.

These false narratives have found themselves a captive audience. Data from April 2022 revealed that Filipinos are second in the world for time spent online (averaging around 10 hours and 27 minutes each day),² with Facebook and YouTube being the top two social media platforms in terms of registered users. In September 2021, Pulse Asia reported that 99 per cent and 57 per cent of Filipino internet users have Facebook and YouTube accounts, respectively.³ Coming in third is TikTok, a video-sharing platform that was launched in 2017 by the Chinese company ByteDance. TikTok rose to global fame by becoming a source of popular dance challenges, internet pranks and other entertaining content. In 2021, TikTok was the most downloaded mobile application in the world.⁴ The Philippines is ranked seventh in the world for TikTok usage as of May 2022, with 40.4 million active users aged 18 and above. This means more than a third of the Philippine population is on TikTok.⁵

TikTok's popularity can be attributed to the following factors. First, it thrives on short-form contents that range from 15 seconds to three minutes. The platform offers intuitive tools for users to create videos that can be adorned with graphic effects, text and background music. Second, TikTok's algorithm collects similarly themed videos based on the user's engagements (likes, comments, shares and saved videos) which are then collated in a personalized homepage called the "For You Page" (FYP). One of TikTok's distinct features is its endless scrolling feature in the FYP that allows users to swipe quickly from one video to the next. Overall, TikTok's algorithm caters to users' personal tastes and is designed to keep them immersed in the platform for an indefinite amount of time.

The popularity of TikTok among Filipinos has made the platform susceptible to the spread of disinformation and distortion of historical facts. Apart from COVID-19 conspiracy theories, one of the top disinformation themes on TikTok included the idea that Marcos Sr. presided over the so-called "golden age" of the Philippines.⁶ In December 2021, VERA Files, a Philippine non-profit independent media organization, released a report indicating that most election-related disinformation is spread through videos, which are often circulated on Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. The same report noted that Bongbong Marcos had benefitted the most from election-related disinformation on social media because among the most popular posts were misleading claims about the Marcos family's ill-gotten wealth and denials of the atrocities committed during martial law.⁷

How was TikTok used as a platform for disinformation and historical distortion to boost Bongbong Marcos's presidential campaign? By analysing some of the most popular Marcos-related contents on TikTok in terms of viewer and "like" counts, I argue that pro-Marcos content on TikTok focused less on the promotion of Marcos Jr. as a viable presidential candidate, and more on the glorification of the Marcos clan. By tackling this relatively understudied platform, this article seeks to contribute to the emerging conversation on the use of TikTok for political purposes, especially electoral campaigns.

It is interesting to note that TikTok videos can reach audiences of diverse age groups and backgrounds potentially faster than Facebook and YouTube due to its unique feature that allows a user to download any video directly from the platform, subject to the video owner's privacy settings. This allows TikTok videos to be conveniently re-uploaded to other platforms. This ability to transmit content quickly and easily to a wider audience has made TikTok videos a potent campaign tool. In Spain, for example, major political parties used TikTok to campaign in the 2021 Madrid regional elections.⁸ Similarly, Colombian politician Rodolfo Hernández earned the title "TikTok King" because of his strategic use of the platform in his 2022 presidential campaign.⁹ In the 2022 Philippine presidential race, TikTok also loomed large.

Among the ten presidential candidates in the 2022 Philippine elections, Bongbong Marcos was the most popular on TikTok. Coming in second was his closest opponent, Leni Robredo. As of early July 2022, four of the most popular hashtags related to Marcos Jr.'s candidacy had each earned views in the billions—"#bongbongmarcos" (3.4 billion views), "#bbmsarah2022" (2.3 billion views), "#uniteam" (2.5 billion views) and "#bbm2022" (2 billion views)—for a grand total of over 10 billion views. Other hashtags related to the Marcos family include "#sandromarcos" (4.3 billion views), "#ferdinandmarcos" (816.6 million views) and "#imeldamarcos" (609.3 million views), totalling to another 5.7 billion views. By contrast, the top four TikTok hashtags related to Leni Robredo garnered only around 6.6 billion views. Taken together, the Marcoses are by far the most popular Filipino political family on TikTok.

Bongbong Marcos himself has an official TikTok account with over 1.6 million followers, but the most popular pro-Marcos content on the platform is generated by the hundreds of "fan" accounts dedicated to members of the Marcos family. Whether or not the Marcoses were directly involved in the mobilization of

their supporters on TikTok requires further study. What is clear is that on TikTok, it is not Marcos Jr. himself who has produced the most popular videos, nor are these popular videos directly sourced from his official campaign team; rather, these were created by his supporters. This provides a glimpse of how TikTok can shift the conduct of political communication on social media through the empowerment of the ordinary user. In contrast to other social media platforms where the size of one's network and following matters in terms of effectively disseminating content, TikTok's algorithm allows for videos coming from ordinary citizens and not just influential public figures to gain traction and reach vast audiences.

Based on the most popular TikTok hashtags related to Bongbong Marcos and the Marcos family, I found that their supporters tended to produce "feel-good" videos involving different members of the Marcos clan instead of directly campaigning for Marcos Jr. through a presentation of his electoral platforms and plans for the country. The most popular pro-Marcos videos revolved around three themes: the whitewashing of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship; the portrayal of the love story of Imelda Marcos and Marcos Sr. as a match made in heaven; and the "celebrification" of Marcos Jr.'s eldest son, Sandro Marcos. Overall, what is common among the videos anchored on these themes was that they contributed to the rehabilitation of the Marcos family name by popularizing individual family members.

One of the most popular pro-Marcos TikTok videos under "#bongbongmarcos" had 11.6 million views, 1.5 million likes and over 9,000 comments.¹⁰ It was a 32-second reposted clip from TikTok user @naomigli, featuring a May 2016 interview with Nur Misuari, the founder of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). In that interview, Misuari said that his preferred vice-presidential candidate was Bongbong Marcos. When probed by the interviewer about his support for Marcos Jr. despite the bloody link between Marcos Sr. and the Muslim separatist movement led by the MNLF, Misuari answered: "The fault of the father cannot be inherited by the son. Neither the father can be accused of the wrongdoings of his son." Dramatic music accompanied the whole clip.

This video was a direct response to critics who argued that it was deplorable for another Marcos to become the president since the family has yet to be held accountable over the bloodstained legacy of Marcos Sr. Apart from the attempt to distinguish the son from the father, the message also fed into pro-Marcos narratives of forgiveness and "national healing".¹¹ These narratives were profusely

spread on Facebook and YouTube, with phrases such as “Move on!” and “Past is past!” commonly thrown around to dismiss the calls for accountability over the sins of the Marcos family, particularly the human rights violations committed during the Marcos dictatorship. However, the suggestion to distinguish father from son is ironic considering that support for Marcos Jr. was in fact strongly based on support for Marcos Sr.¹²

Other popular pro-Marcos TikTok videos touched upon Filipino cultural traits to further rehabilitate the family's image. Examples included videos under both “#ferdinandmarcos” and “#imeldamarcos” that featured the romance of Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos Sr.¹³ This fed into Filipinos' penchant for romantic stories that fit the soap opera archetype. Moreover, the portrayal of Sandro Marcos as a heartthrob among teenage girls in the videos under “#sandromarcos” capitalized on the fondness of Filipinos for celebrities.¹⁴ These TikTok videos were meant to alter people's perceptions towards the family. They tried to separate the son from the father to assuage worries that Marcos Jr. might commit the same mistakes as his father. The videos painting Ferdinand and Imelda as an ideal romantic couple and Sandro as a good-looking celebrity were further attempts to cast doubt on the atrocities of the Marcos family (such as human rights violations and massive corruption) by painting them as a “good” family. Despite their silence about Marcos Jr.'s specific political platforms and campaign promises, these popular pro-Marcos videos on TikTok boosted his presidential campaign by making him and his family more visible and more relatable to the ordinary Filipino.

Prior to the 2022 elections, Marcos Jr. already had a solid base of social media supporters due to his consistent use of Facebook and YouTube since his narrow 2016 vice presidential electoral loss. In a country where personality politics reigns supreme, maintaining a strong and engaging social media presence is crucial, and occupying significant space in another popular platform such as TikTok has led to the amplification of the Marcos family name. Supporters of the Marcos family were key players in spreading pro-Marcos messages on TikTok that, in effect, translated to campaigning for Bongbong Marcos. While more in-depth analyses are needed to determine the extent of TikTok's contribution in delivering the presidency for Marcos Jr., it is worth noting that TikTok's biggest audience, youth aged between 18 and 24, was also where support for Marcos Jr. was the strongest among all age groups. Pre-election surveys noted that the biggest chunk of Marcos Jr. supporters came from

the three youngest age groups (18–24, 25–34, and 35–44 years old), which comprised more than 56 per cent of the voting population.¹⁵ These are the generations that were too young to either remember or experience the martial law period, are the most avid users of social media, and are prone to disinformation given the lack of substantive discussions on the Marcos dictatorship in Philippine history lessons and textbooks.¹⁶

Concerted efforts to combat disinformation are needed in both offline and online settings, either through addressing the gaps in the education system or by using the same social media platforms to amplify facts. TikTok has been widely criticized for its weak content moderation policies that have led to the proliferation of lies on the platform.¹⁷ Despite the company's reported efforts to curb disinformation,¹⁸ it has not been enough. TikTok's potential to spread information in a fast-paced manner can be beneficial to the public when used properly. However, it can be dangerous when used to distort facts and present alternative versions of history. The use of TikTok in support of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 Philippine elections demonstrated such dangers. The Rappler report on the Marcos family's "networked propaganda" noted that the strategy of rehabilitating the family's name through social media began as early as 2014, with the use of TikTok by Marcos supporters appearing to be an extension of this project. The main objective of this years-long project has been achieved: the Marcoses are finally back in Malacañang, 36 years after they were ousted from power.

NOTES

- ¹ Gemma Mendoza, "Networked Propaganda: How the Marcoses are using Social Media to Reclaim Malacañang", *Rappler*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/245290-marcos-networked-propaganda-social-media/>.
- ² Cristina Eloisa Baclig, "Social Media, Internet Craze Keep PH on Top 2 of World List", *Inquirer.net*, 29 April 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1589845/social-media-internet-craze-keep-ph-on-top-2-of-world-list>.
- ³ "September 2021 Nationwide Survey on News Sources and Use of the Internet, Social Media, and Instant Messaging Applications", Pulse Asia Research Inc., 12 October 2021, <https://www.pulseasia.ph/september-2021-nationwide-survey-on-news-sources-and-use-of-the-internet-social-media-and-instant-messaging-applications/>.
- ⁴ David Curry, "Most Popular Apps (2022)", *Business of Apps*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/most-popular-apps/>.
- ⁵ "TikTok Statistics and Trends", *Data Reportal*, 12 May 2022, <https://datareportal.com/essential-tiktok-stats>.

- ⁶ Jose Mari Hall Lanuza, Rossine Fallorina and Samuel Cabbuag, “Understudied Digital Platforms in the Philippines”, *Internews*, December 2021, <https://internews.org/resource/understudied-digital-platforms-in-the-philippines/>.
- ⁷ Merinette Retona, “VERA Files Fact Check Yearender: Marcos Jr. Benefited the Most From Election-Related Disinformation in 2021, Robredo was Favorite Target”, *VERA Files*, 28 December 2021, <https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-yearender-marcos-jr-benefited-most-ele>.
- ⁸ Víctor López Fernandez, “Nuevos medios en campaña. El caso de las autonómicas de Madrid en TikTok” [New Media in Political Campaigns. The Case of Madrid Regional Elections in 2021 on TikTok], *Universitas-XXI* 36 (March 2022): 207–26.
- ⁹ Vanessa Buschschlüter, “‘TikTok King’, 77, Challenges Ex-Rebel for Colombia’s Top Job”, *BBC*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-61631964>.
- ¹⁰ `penguin [@naomigli], “#marcos #bongbongmarcos”, TikTok video, 17 September 2021, <https://www.tiktok.com/@naomigli/video/7008787825554476315>.
- ¹¹ Fernan Talamayan, “The Politics of Nostalgia and the Marcos Golden Age in the Philippines”, *Asia Review* 11, no. 3 (2021): 273–304.
- ¹² Dean Dulay, Allen Hicken, Ronald Holmes and Anil Menon, “Who’s Voting for ‘Bongbong’ Marcos to be the Next Filipino President?”, *Washington Post*, 6 May 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/06/bongbong-marcos-duterte-philippines-election-may9/>.
- ¹³ sapatos ni Sandro. [@pyreditsw], “< 3 | #ferdinandmarcos #imeldamarcos”, TikTok video, 16 March 2022, <https://www.tiktok.com/@pyreditsw/video/7075551374812925211>.
- ¹⁴ sam•sere. [@jaderolloda], “FUTURE.MP4 @#crystal_qt #foryou #foryoupage #fyp #ilocanodefenders #sandromarcos”, TikTok video, 18 March 2022, <https://www.tiktok.com/@jaderolloda/video/7076299180896996634>.
- ¹⁵ Pia Ranada, “Marcos Jr. is Top Pick of Generation Z, Says Pulse Asia Survey”, *Rappler*, 14 March 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/marcos-jr-top-pick-generation-z-pulse-asia-survey-february-2022/>.
- ¹⁶ Franz Jan Santos, “How Philippine Education Contributed to the Return of the Marcoses”, *The Diplomat*, 23 May 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/how-philippine-education-contributed-to-the-return-of-the-marcoses/>.
- ¹⁷ Tim Culpan, “TikTok is the New Front in Election Misinformation”, *The Washington Post*, 29 June 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/tiktok-is-the-new-front-in-election-misinformation/2022/06/28/0aedd53e-f73b-11ec-81db-ac07a394a86b_story.html.
- ¹⁸ “Safety”, TikTok Newsroom, <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/fil-ph/>.

Philippine Elections 2022: The Dictator's Son and the Discourse around Disinformation

JONATHAN CORPUS ONG

Social media was central to Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.’s electoral success, but not in the sense that his campaign had somehow unlocked their hidden features for technological brainwashing. Unfortunately, some pundits looking for quick rationalizations for his landslide victory in the May 2022 polls repeated much of the same explanatory devices from 2016. Many pundits had then attributed the wave of “surprise” populist victories of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Brexit in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump in the United States to what were hyped to be election-determining factors of social media-fuelled disinformation, troll and bot armies, and Russian influence operations.

Critical scholars have since advanced more holistic analyses in recent years, including the powerful critique from Global South researchers that emphasized the diverse interlocking factors that shape contemporary digital political culture. Many have pointed out that the warlike operations of political fandoms and attention-hacking techniques of media manipulators have flourished due to the longer

JONATHAN CORPUS ONG is Associate Professor of Global Digital Media at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Center of Harvard Kennedy School. Postal address: Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 79 JFK St., Cambridge, MA 02138; email: jcong@umass.edu.

histories of charismatic leadership and patronage politics, inter-elite competition and factionalism, and the entrepreneurialism of partisan media outfits.¹ As such, it was disheartening that the key questions raised in liberal spaces about Marcos Jr.'s presidential win reverted back to the reductive discourses of 2016, asking questions such as "Are opinion polls even trustworthy?"² and "Did Filipinos vote with free will, or were they insidiously manipulated on social media?"³

Discourses about social media disinformation exerting outsized influence and causing a "behaviour modification" in voters are not only reductive; they are also downright dangerous. Insofar as such discourses blame the less-educated, the poor and the younger generation for their gullibility as audiences of disinformation and for their responsibility as the primary producers of disinformation, such expressions have only exacerbated the social divisions that populist leaders have stoked to their advantage. Worse, when progressive politicians, social movement organizers, journalists and academics scapegoat "online trolls" as the newest version of the historically problematic "dumb voter" ("*bobotante*") trope,⁴ they affirm the populist publics' perception of the progressive movement as elitist, hypocritical and detached from everyday realities. When finger-pointing is too focused on external or technological villains, we might miss asking the much tougher questions of how to penalize the local creative economies churning out attack memes for profit, or how progressives might develop more satisfying narratives that directly speak to the populist publics' grievances.

If progressives want to truly address the deeper structural issues relating to social media-fuelled disinformation *and* rebuild the movement for a future beyond the second Marcos presidency, then we need to get the discourse about disinformation right this time around. If we continue to perceive that the problem with social media is in how it serves as the tools of top-down mind control of the "*bobotante*", and thus channel our energies to hunting down the stereotypical lower-income-class Marcos or Duterte troll, then we risk advancing solutions that do more harm than good and alienate the communities historically excluded from social reform. If we mischaracterize the disinformation crisis, then we risk letting off the political and economic elites who are the chief disinformation architects commissioning, designing and profiting from these toxic campaigns.⁵ Indeed, liberal politicians' own legal proposals that claim to address "fake news" have fixated on unmasking anonymous accounts rather than going after the ambitious masterminds behind these networks.⁶

Moving forward, what we need are strategic policy advocacies, sincere efforts at grassroots listening and persuasive narratives addressing communities' fears and anxieties. Clearly, based on our investments in the Philippines' disinformation mitigation space in the past six years, the liberal weapons of fact-checking and historical accuracy are insufficient when engaging with the interconnected problem of a corrupt information ecosystem and the publics' willing (rather than "brainwashed") embrace of authoritarian fantasies. Platform accountability advocacies that spotlight Facebook—and recently, TikTok—for "ruining democracy" are just not enough. While such efforts connect the country's issues with broader global coalitions lobbying for platform accountability, these need to be complemented with local accountability initiatives that curb proudly Pinoy disinformation-for-hire operations.

The Philippines' pro-democracy movement needs to take stock of what has worked and what has not in the disinformation mitigation space. I argue that we need to move towards creating more dynamic spaces for experimental collaboration for listening projects, critical digital literacy programmes and narrative-building alongside journalistic fact-checking and academic research. We should also hold space for community healing and worker well-being for those bravely—and precariously—on the frontlines of fighting disinformation. This requires a truly inclusive "whole-of-society" approach,⁷ where people work together rather than in parallel or in competition with each other.⁸

Marcos' Media Strategy

Marcos' presidential victory was not inevitable. The expedient power-brokering between the elite families of Marcos and Duterte, facilitated by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, focused on these families' powerful yet volatile political machineries, consolidated their various regional voting blocs and aligned themselves to the insidious populist message that they were against the "liberal elite" class.⁹

For this election cycle, Marcos' two-tiered campaign on mainstream and social media was strategic, but not particularly exceptional. On mainstream media, Marcos played it painfully safe by refusing to answer tough questions from journalists, avoiding direct confrontations in live television debates and reverting to hollow slogans of national unity and positivity. In contrast to Duterte, whose

unpredictable and uncouth expressions were covered as “media events” and dominated national—even global—conversations during the 2016 campaign, Marcos limited journalists’ access to those likely to portray him in a positive light. His favoured partisan media outfits—composed of a new television channel along with older print publications and online news sites—had gradually acquired mainstream legitimacy under the Duterte administration yet lacked regulatory oversight for their own “fake news”, in the same way that social media influencers have none.¹⁰

On social media, Marcos’ campaign was more creative and confrontational. Here, he finally reaped the rewards from his long-term project of rebranding the family from being perpetrators of corrupt dictatorship to glamorous and misunderstood public figures. This rebranding predated social media, and their comeback trail was paved slowly through re-glamourizations granted by lifestyle magazines, fashion brand endorsements and arts and culture events.

Therefore, the function of social media in their rebranding should not be understood in a kind of determinist or originating capacity, but in their unique capacity to enable fervent fan participation in Marcos family mythmaking, folklore and disinformation campaigning. Marcos-commissioned professional videos and glossy magazine photos, archived on social media, were the ingredients for later amateur fan and influencer TikTok collages, YouTube reaction videos, conspiracy theory deep dives and meme war ammunition for the aggressive social media campaign complementing the bland mainstream media campaign.

Following this two-tier strategy, Bongbong and his sister Senator Imee Marcos’ official YouTube channels adopted influencer vernaculars of relatability and authenticity to craft contrasting and complementary personas: the former a generically bland family man, and the latter snarkier, unpredictable and fiercely charismatic. While Bongbong refused to attack directly, Imee Marcos’ official YouTube channel deployed her real-talk auntie persona fluent in gay humour (“*maldita*”) to satirize her brother’s presidential rival head-on.¹¹ Imee’s satirical representation of Vice President Leni Robredo as the elitist yet bumbling “Len-Len” in a series of skits evaded dominant disinformation interventions of fact-checking and platform takedowns; these also set the talking points¹² for her fans to spin off for their own tweets and TikTok videos.

Many historians, journalists and artist-activists have rightfully focused their efforts on correcting the historical distortions peddled

by the Marcos family, that Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship was the golden age of Philippine society instead of a dark period of human rights abuse and government corruption. While the corrections are important, these could have been complemented with the development of counter-narratives.

It is important that we understand "Marcos historical revisionism" not simply in terms of the perpetration of falsehoods; this is also a communicative performance that they are misunderstood victims in Filipino history. Framed in this way, the Marcos family story could thus relate with anyone's social and economic experiences of victimhood. Behind the varied revisionist expressions of martial law is a consistent "deep story",¹³ in which the Marcos family are supposedly the real victims of "elite" establishment politicians, academics, journalists and even the activists who were tortured during the dictatorship. This false victimhood performance is an artfully compelling story that appeals to the anxious, the young and the disenfranchised. Thus, the dominant disinformation intervention of the fact-check runs into an obstacle: fact-checking can only correct individual claims of falsehoods,¹⁴ but could not respond to the melodramatic "deep story" that an all-powerful coalition of "liberal elites" has victimized the family which once brought honour and glory to a beleaguered nation.¹⁵

Preventing Activist Burnout through Compassionate Coalitions

It is important that progressive coalitions continue to invest in more thoughtful efforts at disinformation mitigation, counter-narrative development and digital literacy. Beyond the usual lobbying for platform takedowns and name-and-shame campaigns against bloggers, progressive groups should anticipate how our information ecosystem will become further stratified between those supportive of Marcos and those who are not.

The Philippines is likely to follow countries such as India and Thailand with wildly polarized information environments, where television channels, social media influencers, and also academic institutions, think tanks, polling agencies, political pundits, and all corners of knowledge production, affirm the identities and belief systems of their political camp of choice.¹⁶ To counter this, what liberals need is more public education about the processes and methods of knowledge production. We cannot take for granted that publics should trust traditional liberal institutions, but actively make a case about the values that inform our hard work.

Though Marcos Jr. is unlikely to enforce the direct censorship of mainstream and social media, legal intimidation and online harassment will doubtless be used to silence criticism. Marcos Jr. himself could villainize social media platforms for being “biased” in their financial support for local journalists and fact-checkers that he would label as unpatriotic “fake news” generators—in a rhetoric similar to that of Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In this context, academic writing, political criticism and progressive coalition-building will be hugely challenging. An existential crisis for liberal democratic institutions will trigger feelings of defensiveness, defeat and burnout among its frontline workers. As interviews with communications workers in Filipino human rights organizations by my colleagues and myself have revealed, it is common for the passion and creativity of activists to fizzle out due to a lack of financial and mental health resources, as well as infighting within a sector where organizations must compete to survive.¹⁷ In this light, we also need gentleness and grace in extending compassion to communities we serve, the colleagues we work with and to our own selves.

NOTES

- ¹ See Paula Chakravarty and Srirupa Roy, “Mediatized Populisms: Inter-Asian Lineages”, *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 4073–92; Jose Mari Hall Lanuza and Cleve V. Arguelles, “Media System Incentives for Disinformation: Exploring the Relationships between Institutional Design and Disinformation Vulnerability”, in *Disinformation in the Global South*, edited by Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022); David Nemer, “The Human Infrastructure of Fake News in Brazil”, Social Science Research Council, 6 July 2021, <https://items.ssrc.org/extremism-online/the-human-infrastructure-of-fake-news-in-brazil/>; Sahana Udupa, “Nationalism in the Digital Age: Fun as a Metapractice of Extreme Speech”, *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 3143–63.
- ² Questions about the validity of opinion polls and the electoral process were controversial points of debate throughout the election season. Both Marcos supporters and liberals had their own versions of conspiracies about electoral fraud. Some analysts supportive of Vice President Leni Robredo also criticized the supposed “flawed methodology” and “bias” of reputable polling agency Pulse Asia, and advanced rival datasets based on sentiment analysis and Google Trends predicting a much closer race between Marcos and Robredo. Although Pulse Asia Director Ronald Holmes had to publicly defend his organization against smear attacks dubbing it “False Asia”, the final election results vindicated Pulse Asia’s methods. See, for example, “On the Campaign Trail with John Nery: Social Data Versus Surveys”, *Rappler*, 4 May 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/>

nation/elections/on-the-campaign-trail-john-tery-social-data-versus-surveys/; and Krixia Subingbing, “Surveys Under Scrutiny; Pulse Asia Stands By Method”, *Inquirer.net*, 5 May 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1592530/surveys-under-scrutiny-pulse-asia-stands-by-method>.

- ³ The liberal assumption that some voters are brainwashed, while not new, continued to be amplified, though expressed with new variations. See, for example, “Maria Ressa Discusses Role of Disinformation in Philippine Elections”, *Rappler*, 10 May 2022, <https://twitter.com/rapplerdotcom/status/1523885779784663040>.
- ⁴ See Cleve V. Arguelles, “We are Rodrigo Duterte: Dimensions of the Philippine Populist Publics’ Vote”, *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, no. 3 (2019): 417–37; Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2016): 91–109.
- ⁵ Jonathan C. Ong and Jason V. Cabanes, *Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines* (Newton Tech4Dev Network: 2018), https://scholarworks.umass.edu/communication_faculty_pubs/74/.
- ⁶ Jonathan C. Ong and Jason V. Cabanes, “When Disinformation Studies Meets Production Studies: Social Identities and Moral Justifications in the Political Trolling Industry”, *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 5771–90.
- ⁷ See Joan Donovan, Brian Friedberg, Gabrielle Lim, Nicole Leaver, Jennifer Nilsen and Emily Dreyfuss, “Mitigating Medical Misinformation: A Whole of Society Approach to Countering Spam, Scams and Hoaxes”, *Media Manipulation Casebook*, Harvard Kennedy School Shorenstein Center, 24 March 2021, <https://mediamanipulation.org/research/mitigating-medical-misinformation-whole-society-approach-countering-spam-scams-and-hoaxes>.
- ⁸ Jonathan C. Ong, “Building Comprehensive Approaches to Combating Disinformation in Illiberal Settings: Insights from the Philippines”, *Global Insights*, National Endowment for Democracy, December 2021, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Combating-Disinformation-in-Illiberal-Settings-Insights-from-the-Philippines-Jonathan-Corpus-Ong.pdf>.
- ⁹ Julio Teehankee, “Why Eleksyon 2022 is ‘Political Multiverse of Madness’ According to Political Scientist”, *GMA News*, 6 May 2022, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/830888/why-eleksyon-2022-is-political-multiverse-of-madness-according-to-political-scientist/story/>.
- ¹⁰ Just as critical disinformation scholars in the United States have spotlighted the role of mainstream media such as Fox News in amplifying and legitimizing conspiracies and disinformation, the Philippines should reflect on what strategic policy interventions are needed to curtail propaganda coming from increasingly partisan broadcast and print outlets. See Daniel Kreiss, Joshua O. Barker and Shannon Zenner, “Trump Gave Them Hope: Studying the Strangers in Their Own Land”, *Political Communication* 34, no. 3 (2017): 470–78.
- ¹¹ Jauhn Etienne Villaruel, “Real Talk: The ‘Destabilizing’ Charisma of Imee Marcos”, *ABS-CBN News*, 30 June 2022, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/spotlight/06/30/22/the-destabilizing-charisma-of-imee-marcos>.

- ¹² Manila Standard Showbiz, “Imee Marcos Soars High on TikTok”, *Manila Standard*, 19 May 2022, <https://manilastandard.net/showbitz/314229554/imee-marcos-soars-high-on-tiktok.html>.
- ¹³ See Arlie R. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (London and New York: New Press, 2016).
- ¹⁴ Critical disinformation scholars such as Joan Donovan, Alice Marwick and Whitney Philipps rightly warn that journalistic reports and fact-checks of disinformation influencers, in certain contexts, could inadvertently platform violent extremist positions and further popularize influencers with fringe beliefs. They caution journalists to practise “strategic silence”, especially in contexts where online groups see disinformation or crisis events as opportunities for recruitment and radicalization. See, for example, Miranda Katz, “How the Media Helped Legitimize Extremism”, *Wired*, 25 May 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/study-media-and-extremism/>.
- ¹⁵ For deliberative democracy, Nicole Curato, addressing the deep stories of populist publics, begins with listening projects. She proposes the deliberative forum methodology to begin this initiative. See Jonathan C. Ong and Nicole Curato, “Multistakeholder Dialogue on Electoral Disinformation”, (with Bianca Franco) *Internews*, December 2021, https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Internews_Multistakeholder-Dialogue-Electoral-Disinformation_December_2021.pdf.
- ¹⁶ Duncan McCargo, “Thailand’s Urbanized Villagers and Political Polarization”, *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 365–78.
- ¹⁷ Jonathan C. Ong, Jeremy Tintiangko and Rossine Fallorina, “Human Rights in Survival Mode: Rebuilding Trust and Supporting Digital Workers in the Philippines”, *Media Manipulation Casebook*, Harvard Kennedy School Shorenstein Center, 2021, <https://mediamanipulation.org/research/human-rights-survival-mode-rebuilding-trust-and-supporting-digital-workers-philippines>.

Philippine Elections 2022: Bongbong Marcos Stories as Told by Filipino Voters

ARILD ENGELSEN RUUD AND CECILIE ENDRESEN

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.’s overwhelming victory in the 2022 presidential election begs questions about how popular perceptions of him influenced voting decisions.¹ We conducted three weeks of fieldwork in the Philippines in April and May 2022, in Batangas, Manila Metro, Leyte and Ilocos Norte,² conducting over 50 unstructured or semi-structured interviews and two surveys (in Leyte and Manila) of altogether 35 respondents. The interviewees included both hardcore “Bongbong” supporters and ordinary voters.

The Philippines has been characterized as “patient zero” for fake news,³ while Bongbong and his campaign have been accused of using social media to whitewash the contentious tenure of his father, President Ferdinand E. Marcos, who ruled the country from 1965 until 1986. Stories about the supposedly idyllic Marcos Sr. era, supposedly characterized by peace and prosperity, circulated on social media for years prior to the election. Although most Filipinos today have no personal experience of the Marcos era, we often heard such idealized accounts of that era in our interviews.

ARILD ENGELSEN RUUD is Professor in the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo. Postal address: Niels Henrik Abels vei 36, 0371 Oslo, Norway; email: a.e.ruud@ikos.uio.no.

CECILIE ENDRESEN is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo. Postal address: Niels Henrik Abels vei 36, 0371 Oslo, Norway; email: cecilie.endresen@ikos.uio.no.

The assertions in many of our informants' stories are factually wrong and the impact of this historical revisionism needs to be analysed. However, our interest lies in how voters use these stories to rationalize their political choices. As the veracity of the individual stories is not our aim, we have left the stories as they were told to us.

We suggest that Filipinos were not harking back to a golden past, but used both the Marcos era and its aftermath as inchoate illustrations of political, cultural and social anxieties in contemporary society. Their apparently straightforward opinions about the presidential candidates, if considered as legitimatizing narratives, became acts of hyperbole and paraphrasing that stood in for their non-verbalized sentiments. As such, they functioned as versions of what James C. Scott has called "hidden transcripts".⁴

One oft-recounted story concerns the "Marcos gold", the supposedly huge hoard of gold or vast bank deposits held by the family. Few questioned the existence of the Marcos fortune, although its provenance remained mysterious and mythical. Some insisted that Marcos Sr. had already been rich before coming to power, possibly as a successful lawyer. According to some extremely poor informants in Manila, this explained his "900 trillion dollars" pay check. A tricycle driver in Tolosa in Leyte insisted that the Marcoses had made clever investments. Others retold the famous story of the Yamashita gold—the gold hoard supposedly hidden by the Japanese somewhere in the Philippines during the Second World War—that Marcos Sr. allegedly discovered. Some referred to a legendary "golden Buddha", although again they did not question how it ended up in the President's private hands. People who claimed to know about this gold hoard believed Bongbong had access to it, and some told us that he would use it to repay the country's debts.

Most informants retold these stories with a slight smile and perhaps a shrug, as if they thought they were a joke. Similar shrugs and the half-ironic distancing suggest that Filipino voters, like everyone else, will hear stories—whether from friends and neighbours, or from social or traditional media—and treat them with a pinch of salt. The justifications for supporting Bongbong often seemed incoherent, at times rambling, the points often half-baked and unsubstantiated. Some justifications that were offered clearly came from unreliable sources—prompting even neighbours who were listening in to snigger. This is of course hardly unique to Filipino voters or the Philippines, and like elsewhere, such stories functioned more as justifications or ultimately as placeholder

arguments, substituting for other latent beliefs and thoughts that have yet to be clearly formulated.

Bongbong's opponents have long claimed that the historical revisionism of the Marcos Sr. era and the martial law years seeks to put Bongbong in a favourable light. Our interviews suggest that, to an extent, they were right to worry. Most respondents said Marcos Sr. had been a good president, that life was easy or easier in those days, and that Bongbong would continue his father's work. However, few could explain how this personal history would prepare Bongbong for the presidency, except to say that his father had trained him.

Another puzzle was the difficulty many had in concretizing the benefits of the Marcos era. Some mentioned free snacks in school and weekly food packets, and claimed that the value of the Philippine peso had been on par with the American dollar. But who had received the weekly food packets, and what one peso to a dollar actually meant in terms of purchasing power, remained unclear. Only one mentioned the Kadiwa programme for subsidized food necessities, while several listed cheap or subsidized electricity and petrol. Quite a few claimed that, under Marcos Sr., the Philippines had taught Thailand and South Korea modern forms of rice cultivation ("but now we have to import!"), while also attributing the development of the Lung Center, the Heart Center, the Philippine Rice Research Institute and the Bataan nuclear plant to the late dictator.

Almost invariably, people first mentioned road construction as a major undertaking under Marcos Sr. Whereas stories of cheap electricity and petrol, as well as an ability to teach others to produce rice echo contemporary concerns, stories of road construction were less topical. However, the idea of Marcos-built roads seemed like "received wisdom", so often repeated that it appeared to be true even if our interlocutors were mostly unable to mention any examples. A group of three vocal tricycle drivers, who self-identified as Bongbong supporters, insisted that not only had Marcos Sr. built numerous roads, but that he had had them constructed in concrete—indicating quality and solidity—an important point to these professional drivers. However, when asked about the exact locations of these roads in their own town, they were unable to be specific.

This was in Laoag, the capital city of Ilocos Norte, the Marcoses' home province and bailiwick. The pro-Bongbong voice was expected to be strong there. But the tricycle drivers' tongue-in-cheek insistence on praising Ferdinand E. Marcos for constructing unspecified roads, or making unsubstantiated claims about subsidized petrol and

electricity, testified to more complex reasoning beneath the simple assertion that Marcos Sr. had been a great leader.

Another confusing argument was made by an 18-year-old student who worked part-time as a gardener in a local parish church in Leyte. First, he listed his reasons for voting for Bongbong, which he said he had learned from his father. He then started arguing against Leni Robredo, the then vice-president who was running against Marcos Jr. He felt a woman president would “lead to the downfall” of the Philippines, as had happened during the presidencies of Cory Aquino and Gloria Arroyo, he thought. Women cannot be effective leaders, he held. But then he made an exception for Sara Duterte. She was different because she is the daughter of President Duterte and that the Duterte family has a reputation for being “fearless”. According to the student, Sara Duterte would go on the streets and “punch men”,⁵ unlike Leni who would just talk nonsense. He further claimed that Robredo did nothing during her term as vice-president, and that she had in fact destroyed the image of President Duterte. Leni is “just a puppet of the Aquinos”, he said.

The student’s rant revealed two sentiments: his admiration for Rodrigo Duterte, expressed vicariously in his admiration for Sara and his hope that Bongbong would continue the Duterte legacy; and the identification of Leni Robredo with “the Aquinos” and his animosity towards all that the Aquino family had come to represent.

The linking of Leni Robredo to “the Aquinos” probably hurt her campaign. Leni, her associates and her activists were called *kakampinks*, a play on the terms “*kakampi*” (Tagalog for ally) and “pink”, Leni’s campaign colour. However, some voters instead used terms such as *pinklawan*, a play on “pink” and “*dilawan*” or “*dilaw*”, the Tagalog word for yellow. In this context, yellow referred to the campaign colour of Cory Aquino, who was president from 1986 to 1992 after Marcos Sr. was ousted by the People Power movement. Yellow is also associated with Cory’s son, President Noynoy Aquino, who was president from 2010 to 2016, and the Liberal Party. During the 2016 presidential election campaign, Rodrigo Duterte used “yellow” as a derogatory tag for his opponents.

If the Marcoses ostensibly represented a golden past, the Aquinos had come to represent years of hardship after the downfall of Marcos Sr. Interviewees would claim that life had gone from good to bad when Marcos Sr. was ousted, “and Cory Aquino is to blame”. One elderly informant said that when Cory Aquino became president, all good things came to an end: “The value of the peso decreased” and the prices in the market went up. Another claimed

that a platter of fish cost two pesos during Marcos Sr.'s time, but when Cory Aquino became president, "the two-peso platter of fish became ten pesos and just after a month, it had already become twenty pesos". Life became hard and they associated the name Cory with the term *kuri*, which means difficult or hard: "It became difficult for us after Cory became president." For this informant, Leni Robredo was an extension of the Aquinos.

Many insisted that backing Robredo were the same supposedly malevolent "oligarchs" that had supported the Aquinos, namely the Sy children,⁶ the Villar family⁷ and the Lopezzes⁸—ironically many of whom now supported Duterte and Bongbong. Because Duterte ignored the oligarchs, they instead supported Robredo, or so the story went. One informant felt that even if Robredo personally could be trusted, she was weak and would be manipulated by "powerful advisors and oligarchs".

Of all the post-1986 presidents, only Duterte was not associated with the Aquinos, and so stood out as different. An informant in Tolosa, Imelda Marcos' hometown, elaborated admiringly and at length the achievements of Duterte. "Duterte's war on drugs was good. This place is now peaceful. Previously we were anxious about crime and letting the children out. Now the police are visible everywhere", he said. Others said they would vote for Bongbong because "Bongbong will follow Duterte's policies." Even a candidate for political office whose opponent was supported by Bongbong praised Duterte. The president represented a radical improvement in the country's political life and in the lived realities of ordinary people. "He gets things done", said the candidate. "The crime rate has dropped. He does things no president has ever done. He has charisma. He knows how to connect." Many voters whom we interviewed were easily able to list Duterte's achievements, such as the war on drugs, the ban on public smoking, the one-stop shops, the infrastructure projects, and the introduction of passports with a ten-year validity. Some emphasized that Duterte "feels like a true Filipino"; and one held that "When ordinary Filipinos suffer, Duterte is sad." Duterte was a true national leader, they claimed, while Cory and Noynoy Aquino had been very insensitive.

Bongbong benefitted from being seen as "the heir of Duterte". To many informants, Duterte was an effective, powerful and compassionate leader. Our informants' inability to be specific about Marcos Sr.'s achievements contrasted with their ability to be specific when it came to Duterte's. This is partly to be expected due to the recency of Duterte's presidency, but goes some way in diminishing

the importance of the historical revisionism channelled on social media, while also shifting the emphasis to what Duterte represents in cultural or political terms, especially what made him different from “the Aquinos”.

Voters asserted that Marcos Sr. had instilled a sense of pride in the Filipino people, and had sought an independent place for the Philippines in world politics. In the words of one interviewee, Marcos Sr. “represented Filipino ideology and Filipino nationalism” and he “curtailed the foreign powers and ... threatened Subic Bay and the Langley Agreement, and all of that”. “There was pride in Filipino heritage then, in our culture”, another held, and “Marcos worked hard to ensure that we have our own Filipino identity.” According to these views, during Marcos Sr.’s rule, other countries viewed the Philippines with envy.

These widespread sentiments echoed claims about Duterte. One informant felt Bongbong would be the right choice because he would follow Duterte’s independent foreign policy and strike the right balance between the two powerful adversaries, China and the United States. One informant believed that if Bongbong won, “China might back down and let go of the islands in the West Philippines Sea” because Bongbong and Sara Duterte come from strong and powerful families. Robredo, on the other hand, “might sell some portions” of the Philippines to other countries, something that another two informants suggested had already happened under Cory Aquino.

Suspicious about Robredo lingered because of her associates and supporters: some informants claimed that she was with the communists, while others believed that she was supported by the Americans. One claimed the CIA “are financing *Rappler*” (the oppositional online media channel), and some stated that *Rappler* founder Maria Ressa was American. The narrative about the American allegiances of Duterte’s and Bongbong’s opponents and critics goes together with the assertion that Marcos Sr. was ousted by the United States because his nationalist line threatened US interests. In the same vein, the informants believed that the Americans did not trust Bongbong because of his father. This lack of American enthusiasm for the Marcos family was used as proof that Bongbong would be an independent-minded president.

There is reason to be concerned about the impact of “fake news” in Filipino politics. Bongbong supporters mostly justified their stance with reference to a golden era under Marcos Sr. But this embrace of the Marcos myths was mostly half-baked and unsubstantiated,

much more so than claims about Duterte. Many informants instead directed their complaints about the country's contemporary state of affairs at "the Aquinos", which apparently included Leni Robredo. "The Aquinos" was a catch-all term that invoked a laundry list of grievances about living expenses and class differences.

In contrast, Bongbong was identified as a strong leader who would right the country's wrongs, although the Bongbong–Sara Duterte duo was more closely associated with Rodrigo Duterte than with Marcos Sr. Voters saw Duterte as a president capable of independent leadership, who could restrict the powers of the oligarchs and ensure cheaper basic necessities. Most significantly, they saw Bongbong Marcos as his rightful heir.

NOTES

- ¹ The interviews for this article were conducted in English, Tagalog, Waray and Ilocano. The authors are grateful for the energetic assistance of Bianca Franco, Fate Delda and Raisa Neth Salvador. They gratefully acknowledge support from the Norwegian Research Council Grant 31849, "Popular Participation and Leadership in Asian Democracies".
- ² The primary purpose of the project was to investigate pro-Bongbong Marcos sentiments. Metro Manila was chosen because it is the national capital region, with the village in Batangas chosen as a rural comparison. Leyte is the stronghold of the Romualdez clan and the home province of Bongbong's mother Imelda, and Ilocos Norte as the heartland of Marcos senior.
- ³ See Nicole Curato, "Curing 'Patient Zero': Reclaiming Digital Public Sphere in the Philippines", in *From Grassroots Activism to Disinformation*, edited by Aim Sinpeng and Ross Tapsell (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020), pp. 19–41.
- ⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).
- ⁵ The interlocutors were probably referring to a 2011 incident when Sara Duterte punched a sheriff in Davao. See "Philippine mayor filmed punching sheriff in Davao City", BBC, 2 July 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14003784>.
- ⁶ Referring to the six children of the investor Henry Sy Sr. See "Sy siblings", *Forbes*, 8 August 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/sy-siblings/>.
- ⁷ Manuel Villar is the second richest man in the Philippines. See "Manuel Villar", *Forbes*, 8 October 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/manuel-villar/>.
- ⁸ The Lopez family are business magnates and media owners influential in the central Philippines.

Philippine Elections 2022: The Sentimental Masks of Marcos and Robredo

TALITHA ESPIRITU AND GERONIMO CRISTOBAL

Contemporary scholarship on the Marcos family's return to power emphasizes the resurrection of the late dictator's image as an instrument to stir nostalgia for the supposed "golden age" of the Philippine economy and society.¹ The 2022 presidential election, a re-staging of the 2016 vice-presidential rivalry between Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Leni Robredo, not only demonstrated the candidates' command for conjuring images of the melodramatic contest for grassroots support between Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and Corazon Aquino—but also their ability to shed these images at will when these images did not serve that purpose.

In July 2020, Cambridge Analytica employee-turned-whistleblower Brittany Kaiser revealed to journalist Maria Ressa that Marcos Jr. directly approached the political data company before the 2016 elections to "rebrand" the Marcos family's image on social media.² As a result, since 2016, Marcos Jr. has adopted the moniker "BBM",

TALITHA ESPIRITU is Associate Professor of Film and New Media at Wheaton College, United States. Postal address: 26 E Main St, Norton, MA 02766, United States; email: espiritu_talitha@wheatoncollege.edu.

GERONIMO CRISTOBAL is a lecturer in Art History at the Ateneo De Manila University in the Philippines and a PhD student in History of Art and Archaeology at Cornell University, United States. Postal address: B32 Goldwin Smith Hall, Feeney Way, Ithaca, NY, United States; email: gc448@cornell.edu.

the acronym of his childhood nickname, Bongbong Marcos, by which most Filipinos referred to him when his father was still alive. The acronym strategically downplays his much-reviled surname. Kaiser's revelations supported Ressa's findings that massive propaganda and targeted disinformation operations aided Marcos' resurgence in national politics.³

In Robredo and Marcos Jr.'s 2022 presidential contest, campaign materials and related media images reworked the melodramatic strategies of the 1986 contest between Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and Corazon Aquino. However, the 2022 iteration of that political drama ended in a reversal of fortune, with Marcos Jr. appearing to vindicate his father. The role of data-mining and disinformation campaigns⁴ in this turn of events only partially explains this spectacular outcome. What remains unclear is how the voting public's *change of heart*—on a massive scale—appeared to have taken place, enough to persuade them to embrace a data-driven rebranding of the Marcos legacy.

Kaiser described the Marcoses' efforts to rebrand their family as historical revisionism fuelled by the use of online data: "You undertake just enough research to figure out *what people believe* about a certain [...] individual [...] and then you figure out what could convince them to *feel otherwise*."⁵ Kaiser's statement highlights the importance of feelings—more precisely, the transformation of emotions—in political rebranding. We contend that Marcos Jr.'s 2022 campaign relied on portraying him as a victim of US intervention in Philippine politics. He appealed to his base—loyalists to his father's political regime—by soliciting pity for some vague notion of his family's suffering in exile and ongoing abjectness as victims of history.

Vestiges of this political rhetoric were evident in the narrative promoted by Marcos Sr.'s supporters that he was "the most brilliant Filipino of the 20th century" who "led a heroic struggle to modernize the country's politics, economy and society, only to be ousted by the small clique of elite families that have dominated the nation since independence".⁶ This narrative was reiterated in Marcos Jr.'s 30 June inaugural speech.⁷

Leni Robredo also engaged in the political rebranding of her image. She ran for president as an independent and chose pink as her campaign colour, thereby distancing herself from the dense symbolic weight of the yellow colour and its deep association with the Aquino legacy. Her "people's campaign" made much of the fact that it was launched spontaneously, even haphazardly,⁸ and

sustained through the efforts of volunteers. Images of grassroots dynamism appealed to the public memory of the 1986 snap elections, which launched Corazon Aquino's political career. For instance, as a testament to the seamless transferability of charismatic images, renowned social realist painter Elmer Borlongan digitally reworked his 2010 oil on canvas painting "*kapit bisig*", depicting a group of people marching arm-in-arm (an imagery that characterized the martial law years) and gave it a new title, "*Laban Lang*" ("Continue to fight"), to match the contemporary context of Robredo's presidential campaign.

Though Robredo actively disavowed facile comparisons of herself to fellow political widow Corazon "Cory" Aquino, frequent popular opinion columns that compared "Leni People Power" to "Cory People Power"⁹ referenced the two women's extraordinary achievement of leading grassroots popular movements. In reality, the only thing they had in common was who they were up against: Aquino challenged dictator Marcos Sr.; Robredo, his son.¹⁰ Robredo's movement nonetheless piggybacked on the legacy of the first People Power movement, no matter how much Robredo wished to be perceived on her own terms. Furthermore, what was implicitly at stake in Robredo's candidacy was how "Leni People Power" could sustain the collective political affect of "Cory People Power", the authentic groundswell of feeling—as opposed to a stage-managed public spectacle—that propelled the popular revolt that ousted Marcos Sr. in 1986. Those who participated in that uprising believe that they were on the right side of history, but the memory of that moment is now at risk of erasure in the wake of Marcos Jr.'s propaganda-orchestrated victory.

In what follows, we analyse strategic references to 1986 by the campaigns of Marcos Jr. and Robredo, which may be likened to the wearing of masks and the playing of roles in theatrical settings. These metaphorical masks point to the theatricality of political campaigns and lend legibility to the melodramatic roles—such as victim of an injustice or champion of the poor and downtrodden—that each candidate chose to play. In Marcos Jr.'s case, the mask consisted of the heroic image of Ferdinand E. Marcos, Sr.; in Robredo's case, it consisted of Aquino's figuration as the emotional anchor of the 1986 People Power and the "saint of democracy".¹¹ In both cases, instances in which the mask is shed are just as important as when they are invoked, thereby revealing how the objective of political rebranding has been the production of a melodramatic image that can be discarded when it no longer serves its purpose.

The day after winning the 2022 presidential election, Marcos Jr.'s first agenda was to visit his father's grave in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*, or the Heroes' Cemetery. In photos disseminated to the media by his campaign team, BBM is seen via zoomed-in lens removing his KN95 mask and wiping tears (or the sweat from his brow). A portrait of his father as a young congressman dominated the left side of the frame of the photograph distributed by his campaign team to media outlets. For this press event, he issued a written statement, which was read by his secretary to the press, declaring, "Judge me not by my ancestors, but by my actions".¹² This dramatic moment is reminiscent of theatrical traditions pertaining to masks: the embodiment of the mythical being in *Wayang Topeng*, the Balinese dance drama, where actors wear venerated heirloom masks that pay respect to dead ancestors; and the act of transfer or usurpation of power in the Shakespearian tradition, in which the heir is burdened to avenge the father-king or prophesied to ascend to the throne but loses the kingdom, pushing the heir to scheme.¹³

Marcos Jr.'s disavowal of his political lineage was also evident in the beginning of his campaign, which emphasized his individual identity as opposed to the conjugal and familial tropes that characterized his father's regime. His mother and siblings were conspicuously absent during the campaign. Moreover, his wife, Louise Araneta Marcos, initially rebuffed insinuations about her likely future role as the First Lady, though Marcos' estranged cousin and Laoag city mayor Michael Marcos Keon has hinted at Louise Marcos' significance in a Marcos administration: "In many ways, she is BBM's backbone." The statement insinuated that Marcos Jr. does not enjoy the same sharing of power that characterized his parents' conjugal dictatorship, but was instead controlled by his wife.¹⁴

A 2015 interview by journalist Karen Davila in which Leni Robredo disavowed comparisons between herself and Aquino illustrates how the sentimental mask is shed by her camp. Robredo stated that the little that she knew about politics, she learned it through "osmosis" from her late husband, a self-deprecating move that nonetheless reprised how Cory Aquino wore her political inexperience on her sleeve when she campaigned in 1986. Both women were careful not to upset traditional gender norms and reinforced the male-dominated worldview of Philippine politics by attributing their knowledge of its workings to their more experienced husbands.¹⁵

The Robredo campaign also appropriated the "L" hand sign which was first used to signify "LaBan"—a shorthand for *Lakas ng*

Bayan (People Power)—Cory Aquino’s coalition in 1986. In 2010 and 2016, the hand sign stood for “Liberal”, in reference to the name of the traditional political party helmed by Ninoy Aquino (as secretary-general during martial law years) and his son, Noynoy (as chairman during his presidential term). Though Robredo ran as an independent candidate in 2022, she retained her position as the chair of the Liberal Party. However, when her supporters were asked what the “L” sign now meant in 2022, most said that it stood for “Leni”.

Marcos Jr. and Leni’s masks are charismatic images to the extent that they activate affective publics who are emotionally invested in the original melodrama of People Power in 1986, the highly dramatic turn of events in February 1986 that saw a peaceful crowd overthrowing a strongman and installing a housewife to the presidency as poetic justice for the brutal murder of her husband, the chief nemesis of that strongman. The second melodrama is about the ouster of Marcos Sr. and his family’s exile in Hawaii, where they were allegedly mistreated and betrayed by their ally, the United States; the freezing of the Marcos family’s assets, and later the denial of their request to be allowed to return home to give a proper burial to their father, who died in 1989. The public’s emotional investment in these respective melodramas is translated into either efforts to protect the authentic scene of collective political affect that was generated by People Power; or conversely, restoring the “bad object” of the Marcos presidency to its rightful position of power. The donning of both types of masks presupposes the viewer’s ability to feel and empathize with the “suffering” of others: either the suffering of the Marcos family, or the suffering of the masses in People Power.

Marcos Jr.’s mask as the wronged heir was premised on the melodramatic enactment of the eventual victory of Marcosian “virtue”. In melodramatic terms, this mask plays an ameliorative function: to reveal their family’s “innocence” and generate moral outrage against the injustices suffered by their family.

In October 2015, Marcos Jr. released a 20-page comic booklet entitled *Asikasong Bongbong* (*Attentive Service Bongbong*), which was also available on his Facebook page. Black-and-white pages depicted his life’s melodramatic turning points, tracking his childhood and his family’s affluent lifestyle before their exile to Hawaii, before culminating with his tenure as a senator. Several panels retell the events of the People Power uprising from Marcos Jr.’s perspective:

“All of the deception and lies were done by the American soldiers to intimidate the Marcos family. Bongbong could not do anything but shed tears.”¹⁶

The booklet locates the moment of Marcos Jr.’s political transformation in 1992, when he witnessed the country being “submerged in poverty and inflation of basic commodities”.¹⁷ It goes on to set out his positions on various issues affecting the country, pitting him directly against then President Benigno Aquino III, thus stoking the flames of their historic family feud. We can see from this piece of propaganda how melodrama turns the political campaign into a sentimental aesthetic experience, encouraging the reader’s fascination not so much with the authenticity of the actions in Marcos Jr.’s campaign narrative, but by how they make them feel empathy for the hero. But his worth as a political hero rests on neither the facts of his family’s “victimization”, nor the merits of his advocacies, but on the *believability* of his pain as a suffering subject. True feelings, not the facts, matter. Political melodrama incites pleasure, delivering affective information that hooks the spectator with a gimmick.

From Robredo’s campaign, we see a similar channelling of true feelings.¹⁸ Columnist Randy David describes the speech made by Robredo in which her key message was direct: It’s time to leave an abusive relationship. It’s time to fight back. “Whoever loves must do battle for the beloved.”¹⁹ David spots the allegorical registers of Robredo’s statements, which liken the people’s “forebearance with Duterte’s incompetent and violent presidency” to women in abusive relationships who eventually find the courage to leave for the sake of the children. True feeling posits that what makes us human is our ability to empathize with the suffering of others,²⁰ and the speech channels this by invoking empathy for the abused victim.

Robredo’s speech channels Cory’s persona as the figure who was the emotional anchor of People Power. Robredo, a lawyer, uses the metaphor of advocating for victims of domestic abuse to highlight the pain suffered by the people. But this messaging implicitly rests on the power difference between advocate and victim, a power dynamic that is central to sentimental narratives. Robredo addresses an imagined audience who does not identify as a victim of abuse, but whose empathy with such victims will lead them to take up their cause, much like in sentimental narratives where empathy is channelled towards creating a compassionate bond between a privileged reader and the socially abject.²¹ Robredo’s

campaign slogan, “to love is a radical act”, encapsulates the implicit demand within sentimental narratives of personal sacrifice from the privileged reader. However, the empathetic quality of her speech is complicated by the fact that the mask she wore is that of the advocate and not the victim. Compared to Marcos Jr.’s performance of victimhood, or even to Cory Aquino’s, Robredo’s performance is thus less compelling.

Marcos Jr. and Robredo’s masks are sentimental objects adapted to online social networks, which constitute a twenty-first century version of what Lauren Berlant calls the “juxtapolitical” space of everyday life, a parallel space to the political space where communities gather around scenes and stories of social injustice. Their marketing tools, such as comic books and fliers bearing all sorts of political rhetoric, are akin to folklore: they provide the material infrastructure for circulating sentimental narratives and for gathering an intimate public²² together. While not officially running on the same ticket, Marcos Jr. widely campaigned in tandem with Rodrigo Duterte in 2016,²³ establishing the stage for the 2022 rivalry between Marcos Jr. against Robredo. That Marcos Jr. prevailed in this sentimental contest demonstrates how, as Berlant put it, “the booty in contemporary politics is still about whose suffering matters more”.²⁴

Marcos Jr. and Robredo’s melodramatic strategies shine a light on the power of sentimental masks to produce affective attachments. These attachments may lay the affective foundations for more ameliorative social arrangements, even if these arrangements fall short of generating radical, as opposed to moderate, social changes. How true feelings supersede facts is indeed alarming, but we would be remiss not to study how melodrama can facilitate the mobilization of sentimental publics, whether in the top-down configuration of political emotion in Marcos Jr.’s data-driven campaign propaganda, or in the bottom-up sentimentality of “Leni People Power”.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Marcos Jr. won over Leni Robredo in 2022 was the fact that the former wore the mask of the socially abject while the latter only spoke of it in hypotheticals. Marcos had no qualms using his dead father’s legacy. The charismatic image of Marcos Sr. only appealed to 14 million voters in 2016 (under half of Marcos Jr.’s 31 million voters in 2022). Much of his 2022 presidential win is credited by analysts and survey firms to his team-up with Sara Duterte, who delivered the “critical southern vote”.²⁵ Robredo established a solid base of supporters, and her

charismatic image earned the endorsement of a broad coalition of progressive forces. But the elections were never just about Robredo trying to beat Marcos Jr., nor were they just a re-staging of Aquino's triumph over the elder Marcos. After the pairing of Marcos with Sara Duterte was declared, Robredo fought in vain against a unified counter-revolution—a UniTeam of Duterte Populism combined with Marcosian Restoration—that threatened to eviscerate the ideals and collective affect of the 1986 People Power Revolution, which Robredo and her campaign represented.

NOTES

- ¹ See Talitha Espiritu, *Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017); Oscar Serquina, “The Living, the Virtual, and the Dead: Philippine Political Figures in Online Spaces”, *Philippine Studies* no. 1 (2019): 59–93; Fernan Talamayan, “The Politics of Nostalgia and the Marcos Golden Age in the Philippines”, *Asia Review* 11, no. 3 (2021): 237–304.
- ² “Brittany Kaiser: Bongbong Marcos’ Requested for ‘Family Rebranding’”, *Rappler*, 15 July 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyofqL33lRo>.
- ³ Gemma Mendoza, “Networked Propaganda: How the Marcoses are Using Social Media to Reclaim Malacañang”, *Rappler*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/245290-marcos-networked-propaganda-social-media/>.
- ⁴ Sheila Coronel, “The Triumph of Marcos Dynasty Disinformation is a Warning to the U.S.”, *New Yorker*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-triumph-of-marcos-dynasty-disinformation-is-a-warning-to-the-us>.
- ⁵ Sofia Tomacruz, “Bongbong Marcos asked Cambridge Analytica to ‘Rebrand’ Family Image”, *Rappler*, 15 July 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/bongbong-marcos-cambridge-analytica-rebrand-family-image/>.
- ⁶ Duncan McCargo, “Rebranding the Marcos Legacy”, *Nikkei Asia*, 4 July 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Rebranding-the-Marcos-legacy>.
- ⁷ Ferdinand Marcos Jr., “Inaugural Speech”, Presidential Communications Operations Office, 30 June 2022, <https://pcoo.gov.ph/presidential-speech/speech-of-president-ferdinand-bongbong-romualdez-marcos-jr-during-his-inauguration/>.
- ⁸ Regine Cabato, “Leni Robredo’s Grassroots Campaign takes on Marcos Juggernaut”, *Washington Post*, 6 May 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/06/philippines-election-leni-robredo-marcos/>.
- ⁹ Randy David, “Leni and the Struggle for a Revitalized Democracy”, *Inquirer*, 24 April 2022, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/152325/leni-and-the-struggle-for-a-revitalized-democracy>.
- ¹⁰ Rudy Romero, “1986 People Power for Cory, 2022 for Leni”, *Manila Standard*, 24 March 2022, <https://manilastandard.net/opinion/314216505/1986-people-power-for-cory-2022-for-leni.html>.

- ¹¹ Howard Chua, “People Power’s Philippine Saint: Corazon Aquino”, *Time*, 1 August 2009.
- ¹² Anna Bajo, “Judge me not by my ancestors but by my actions, Bongbong tells world”, *GMA Network*, 11 May 2020, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/831327/judge-me-not-by-my-ancestors-but-by-my-actions-bongbong-tells-world/story/>.
- ¹³ See John Gaunt’s speech in *Richard II* Act 2, Scene I. Marcos Jr. said, if he could take one book when stuck on a desert island, it would be the complete works of Shakespeare. Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., “BBM VLOG #50: My Top 5 Books”, YouTube video, 4:12, 22 February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEO33Rj1q-k>.
- ¹⁴ “‘Number One Adviser’: Philippine First Lady to Play Key Role”, *France24*, 27 June 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220627-number-one-adviser-philippine-first-lady-to-play-key-role>.
- ¹⁵ Karen Davila, “Leni Robredo: I’m No Cory Aquino”, *ABS-CBN News*, 14 September 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfk6Q0A1xrI>.
- ¹⁶ Theo David, “Marcos Comics Paints Bongbong as Victim”, *Kami*, 1 April 2016, <https://kami.com.ph/923-marcos-comics-paints-bongbong-victim.html>.
- ¹⁷ “‘Bongbong’ Marcos Also Has His Own Comics Booklet”, *Inquirer*, 31 March 2016, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/777215/bongbong-marcos-also-has-his-own-comics-booklet>.
- ¹⁸ See Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics”, in *Left Legalism/Left Critique*, edited by Janet Halley and Wendy Brown (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁹ Gabriel Lulu, “Robredo on Why She’s Running in 2022”, *Inquirer*, 7 October 2021, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1498488/robredo-on-why-shes-running-for-2022-those-who-love-should-fight-for-their-love>.
- ²⁰ Lauren Berlant, “The Epistemology of State Emotion”, in *Dissent in Dangerous Times*, edited by Austin Sarat (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 46–78.
- ²¹ For an analysis of power within sentimental narratives, see Lauren Berlant, “Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy and Politics”, in *Cultural Pluralism*, edited by Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 53.
- ²² For a primer on an “intimate public” that captures the collective dimensions of intimacy, see Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), p. viii. As intimate publics are “constituted by strangers who consume common texts and things”, the concept lends itself to analysing “mediated social intimacy”.
- ²³ “Sen. Marcos Thanks Supporters Pushing for ALDUB But Reaffirms Partnership with Santiago”, Senate of the Philippines, 10 December 2015, https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2015/1210_marcos3.asp.

- ²⁴ Lauren Berlant and Jordan Greenwald, "Affect in the End Times: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant", *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2012): 82.
- ²⁵ Andreo Calonzo, "Marcos-Duterte Alliance Gets Tested After Big Election Win", *Bloomberg*, 18 May 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-18/marcos-duterte-alliance-gets-tested-after-big-election-win>; Richard Heydarian, "Can Leni Beat Marcos Jr.?", *Inquirer*, 15 February 2022, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/149859/can-leni-beat-marcos-jr>.