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Introduction

The Marcos Jr. Administration at Midway: Dynastic Entrenchment and Competition in a Patronage Democracy

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Written at the midpoint of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s presidency (2022–), this volume assesses the midterm performance of the Marcos-Duterte administration amid a shifting domestic political landscape. Deliberately moving beyond the widely publicized emphasis on foreign policy, the chapters in this book examine the internal dynamics of Philippine politics—tracking developments across political, social and economic arenas.

We begin by situating the first three years of the Marcos Jr. administration within the broader context of dynastic entrenchment and intensifying intra-elite competition, exemplified by the escalating tensions and eventual public rupture between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte. The disintegration of the UniTeam alliance culminated in a highly contentious 2025 midterm election, which served as a critical test of the administration's political strength. While Marcos Jr.'s allies retained a Senate majority, the Duterte camp also made significant gains—possibly enough to shield the vice president from, what was then, looming impeachment efforts and reaffirm her camp's national relevance. Former President Rodrigo Duterte's dramatic electoral comeback from the International Criminal Court (ICC) detention in Davao City further underscored the enduring appeal of the Duterte brand and the deepening fragmentation of elite power in the Philippines.

It is against these developments that we argue the Marcos administration's trajectory is best understood through the lens of dynastic consolidation and elite competition operating within a weakened institutional framework. The 2025 elections reaffirmed that policymaking remains driven less by coherent programmatic agendas than by elite rivalries, regional power bases, and the imperatives of political survival. In this fragmented political landscape, legislative maneuvering, public spectacle, and institutional brinkmanship increasingly displace long-term governance reform. While reform priorities are frequently articulated, they are often sidelined for reasons of political expediency. These neglected yet essential reforms include strengthening oversight institutions, addressing persistent socio-economic inequalities, and fostering the political and economic stability needed to manage both internal pressures and growing external challenges.

While the administration has recorded some modest policy achievements, these have been largely overshadowed by its failure to confront the deeper structural political, social, and economic challenges facing the Philippines in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 28 July 2025, Marcos Jr. declared that his administration would not tolerate corruption, amid mounting allegations that flood control and mitigation projects had been hollowed out by payoffs to members of Congress and the

Senate. Although a series of investigations, hearings, and cases has since been initiated, serious questions remain about their impartiality, transparency, and ultimate objectives.

Emerging evidence suggests a selective accountability dynamic, with investigations appearing to implicate rival clans and dynastic families more readily than political allies or members of the Marcos family. Public pressure for convictions has intensified, yet it remains unclear how committed the administration is to pursuing what may be the country's largest corruption scandal, with estimated annual losses of ₱42.3–118.5 billion (US\$713 million–2 billion) since 2023 (Calimbahin 2025). Instead, the administration has shifted attention to prioritizing an anti-dynasty bill. While recent transparency measures in bicameral budget deliberations have partially placated public concern, meaningful budgetary reforms—particularly those addressing insertions and pork-barrel practices that sustain clientelistic relationships—remain conspicuously absent. By highlighting these dynamics, this volume contributes to a more nuanced understanding of governance under Marcos Jr. and the enduring patterns and evolving tensions of the Philippines' patronage democracy (Teehankee and Calimbahin 2022).

THE MARCOS JR. POLICY AGENDA IN A FRAGMENTING COALITION

Within a month after taking office following a landslide electoral victory, in July 2022 Ferdinand Marcos Jr. gave his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) at the Batasang Pambansa Complex. Speaking in a cadence and style similar to that of his late father, the former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., Marcos Jr. started his speech after raucous applause from members of the House of Representatives and supporters in the gallery. He began with the challenges that the country was facing, stating that: “We live in difficult times brought about by some forces of our own making, but certainly, also by forces that are beyond our control” (Marcos 2022). The statement alluded to both domestic and international issues confronting the Philippines, such as economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing tensions with China over the West Philippine Sea.

In his SONA, Marcos Jr. enumerated multiple economic challenges, such as tax reform, fiscal management and growth outside of the usual

urban areas like Metro Manila and Metro Cebu. It was befitting that Marcos Jr. focused on the need to address economic issues. It is, after all, the topmost concern of Filipinos. Across different administrations, the government has failed to address the rising cost of living. Increasing inequality (Mangahas 2022), even as the economy has grown, has fuelled the disenchantment towards democracy or any talk of reform. From May 1986 to December 2023, a survey review by the Social Weather Stations (2024, p. 18) rated the government's performance in fighting inflation as "poor". In a separate survey, the economy and inflation were ranked as the most important problems facing the country (Social Weather Stations 2025a). While the Philippines is considered one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, self-rated hunger continues to increase, with 27.2 per cent of poor families experiencing hunger (Social Weather Stations 2025b). These numbers are not far from the 30.7 per cent self-rated hunger in September 2020 at the height of the pandemic, when little to no economic activity occurred. Suffering from strict lockdown rules imposed by former President Rodrigo Duterte, the country's economy contracted while unemployment rose, along with food prices (Rivas 2021). Marcos Jr. and his vice president, Sara Duterte, campaigned on post-pandemic economic recovery and unity, which resonated with voters and catapulted the dynastic tandem of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte into the presidency and vice presidency.

Midway into the Marcos Jr. presidency, the country finds itself in uncharted political territory. The rising tensions and rivalry between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte are unprecedented in contemporary Philippine political history. The country continues to reap the ill effects of deeply entrenched dynastic families occupying local and national positions, often putting personal and clan interests ahead of the public's. The firm grip on power of political clans and oligarchs has historically subverted the Philippine state's capacity to enact development strategies and to remedy the country's "defective" democracy (Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020). Political elites at the national level come from dominant dynasties that have their local bailiwicks. And while political clans have long-term rivals, they likewise have allies that can be counted on for long-term support and gains. This intra-elite competition has ratcheted up with the arrest of

former President Rodrigo Duterte and the impeachment of his daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte. The jockeying for power, especially towards forthcoming electoral cycles, further distracts politicians, already with a less-than-stellar record, from having coherent, relevant policies and delivering quality public service. Ultimately, the Filipino public is the loser in this fight among factions of elites. With self-rated poverty at a high of 55 per cent in April 2025 (Social Weather Stations 2025c), the voters will, rightfully, attribute issues such as rising costs of basic commodities and job insecurity to shortcomings in governance.

It is important not to overlook that the vice president was initially part of the administration, holding a key portfolio. Sara Duterte led the Department of Education (DepEd) with a PHP 710 billion budget (US\$12.7 billion) from 2022 to 2024. Additionally, the Office of the Vice President (OVP) was provided with a PHP 2.3 billion (US\$41 million) budget, the highest budget increase and size for the OVP in contemporary Philippine political history (Baclig 2022). This “coalition of convenience” (Calimbahin 2023) was successfully peddled in the 2022 elections as a way to move forward with a measure of continuity from the populist, albeit violent, rule of Rodrigo Duterte. Like previous administrations, the Marcos-Duterte administration leaned on sustaining pre-existing programmes on infrastructure and pandemic recovery efforts. Although the country has recovered from pandemic lows in macroeconomic terms (Department of Finance 2023), inflation, especially food and fuel prices, continues to rise, affecting household incomes and increasing the levels of inequality (Mendoza 2024). Digitalization of public services has improved, with plans to expand in local government units (Abarca 2023). However, bureaucratic efficiency and responsiveness in sectors such as health, education, agriculture and disaster response remain sluggish. To address some of these administrative challenges, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA, recently renamed as Department of Economy, Planning and Development or DEPDev) was reorganized to function as the Department of Economic Planning and Development. It remains to be seen whether this transformation of NEDA into a full-fledged executive department is merely a rebranding exercise or a genuine opportunity for the national government to implement more effective and long-term development strategies.

DYSFUNCTION BY DESIGN? SPLIT-TICKET LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE

The Marcos-Duterte administration is a perfect example of the consequences of split-ticket voting. Marcos Jr. ran under the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas (Federal Party of the Philippines) while Duterte represented the Lakas CMD (Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats) (Buan 2021). In the Philippines, the positions of the president and the vice president are voted for separately. Hence, the top two positions in the Philippines can come from different, if not opposing, parties, making it common to have a government that is fractured at the leadership level. Often, given the hyperpresidential powers of the chief executive, the vice president eventually takes a backseat. Over time, the vice president is strategically diminished, given the outsized role and influence of the president. During the time of Rodrigo Duterte, Vice President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo was antagonized and attacked by the president. Duterte’s allies in Congress also decreased her budget substantially, limiting her public service programmes and leaving her with few resources to perform her duties.

A split-ticket voting system for the president and vice president can, at best, result in a fragmented approach to advancing the country’s interests. At its worst, it can create internal political tensions, undermine a unified vision and prevent effective governance, particularly in the successful implementation of coherent programmes (Reilly and Casiple 2016). This system disproportionately benefits entrenched dynastic families, who possess the resources and a loyal base of supporters to mobilize. With no mechanisms for party loyalty and discipline, dynastic figures often engage in very public rivalries and power struggles. Adding to the complexity is the near absence of strong, programmatic political parties in the Philippines. The dominance of candidate-centred politics, combined with ineffective political parties, further erodes the country’s already fragile democracy (Hutchcroft and Holmes 2022).

It was, therefore, only a matter of time before the two most powerful split-ticket elected leaders of the Philippines would more than just disagree. The arenas for competition were in budget allocations, appointments, the upcoming midterms in 2025 and positioning for the next national elections in 2028. There were also divergent positions on foreign relations, specifically with that of China, the presence of

China-based offshore gaming offices, the approach to crime and security, insurgency and the red-tagging of opposition voices. Tensions between the president and vice president have reached a breaking point, with Vice President Duterte resorting to name-calling the House Speaker Martin Romualdez, smear campaigns regarding President Marcos Jr. for his purported use of illegal substances, as well as death threats against the president.

However, few would have anticipated that before the midterm elections of 2025, the Philippines would witness such an intense level of dynastic competition between a sitting president and vice president. At the beginning of the Marcos-Duterte administration, both took on cabinet portfolios instead of appointing qualified individuals to helm critical agencies. For both, it is fair to say their performances were, at the very least, dismal. Duterte was appointed and accepted, albeit reluctantly, the position of Secretary of Education and eventually resigned two years later.¹ Following their victory in the 2022 elections, Duterte accepted the education portfolio to quell concerns regarding her alleged agenda in asking for the Department of National Defense (Colina 2022). There is some irony that the education sector, which was neglected during her father's presidency, would be given to her to revive. The DepEd under Rodrigo Duterte's six-year presidency had no clear educational policy (Mendoza 2021). At the tertiary level, true to his populist brand, Rodrigo Duterte had signed the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, making state and local universities and colleges affordable for all. However, it was in basic education that the country found itself facing serious challenges, particularly in literacy and numeracy. A World Bank and UNESCO (2021) study showed that the Philippines had an alarming rate of 91 per cent learning poverty, meaning that nine out of ten Filipino students have difficulty in reading and mathematics (Chi 2023).

Under Sara Duterte, the DepEd introduced the Matatag Curriculum, which focused on literacy and numeracy, emphasized discipline and promoted national unity over critical inquiry. Basic education had less emphasis on civic participation, social studies and humanities. Sara Duterte's programmes and projects in the DepEd were tied to political ambitions, ideological positioning and promoting the Duterte political brand. Having the education portfolio gave her national visibility. Not only was Vice President Duterte able to reach parents and teachers'

groups, but she was also present at many programme launches. Learning materials from the department were distributed with her branding, including a children's book that she had authored. Under Duterte, the DepEd was strongly linked with the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). This highly controversial task force, created during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, was notorious for red-tagging and accusing individuals critical of the government of being members of the communist party and insurgency. Students were exposed to anti-communist programmes while organizations of teachers were red-tagged, and left-leaning teachers' groups were harassed and surveilled for "ideological infiltration". The eventual resignation of Duterte as DepEd secretary after two years allowed Marcos Jr. to appoint Senator Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara as her successor. The appointment was generally well-received, with a more hopeful public anticipating forthcoming reforms in the educational sector.

Marcos Jr., on the other hand, held on to the Department of Agriculture (DA) portfolio for seventeen months. In his public pronouncements, Marcos Jr. reiterated the grave crisis in agriculture, promising that the DA would be rid of corruption and provide affordable rice for all—similar to the Masagana 99 programme of his late father. Part of Marcos Jr.'s campaign promise was the PHP 20 per kilo (US\$0.36/kilo) sack of rice, a vow that officials within the DA publicly said was not feasible within the next two years (Rivera and Crisostomo 2023). Later, Marcos Jr. publicly admitted in his 2024 SONA that "the hard lesson of this last year has made it very clear that whatever current data proudly banner our country as among the best performing in Asia, means nothing to a Filipino, who is confronted by the price of rice at 45 (US\$0.80) to 65 (US\$1.16) pesos per kilo" (Marcos 2024).

Observers were baffled at why Marcos Jr. took on the agriculture portfolio at all, given the herculean challenges of a department notorious for corruption and inefficiency (Sevillano 2025). With a budget of PHP 178 billion (US\$3.1 billion), some claimed that Marcos Jr. took on the agriculture portfolio because it was a department that his father had a keen interest in, and second, because he and his inner circle of advisers underestimated the complicated agricultural problems of sustainability and food security.² Critics of Marcos Jr. assailed the increased patronage in the DA since he took over. In response, Marcos

Jr. named government executives and traders involved in smuggling during the time of former President Duterte (Casayuran 2022). Marcos Jr. also signed the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, which includes the creation of a council composed of a multi-agency task force to enforce the law.

The DA’s budget is sizable, especially in support of rice production. It is also a powerful department because it issues permits, licences and extends subsidies to agribusiness networks across the country. When Marcos Jr. finally appointed Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as DA secretary, there was trepidation from some sectors, given that the latter is a major player in the agricultural industry. Since the appointment of Laurel, there have been no significant corruption controversies; however, the consequences of a delayed working secretary in the DA exacerbated issues in the agricultural sector, resulting in a continued increase in food prices that consumers bear. The handling by Marcos Jr. and Duterte of the DepEd and DA in the first two years of their administration and their failures in leading these critical agencies to deliver their mandates reflect the story of capture of the institutions and the primacy of political elites’ vested interests over much-needed institutional reforms that can no longer be ignored.

TABLE 1.1
Significant Controversies During the Stints of Marcos Jr. and Duterte as DA and DepEd Secretaries

Marcos Jr. as DA Secretary	Duterte as DepEd Secretary
Shortage of onion, garlic and sugar, which led to increased prices and hoarding of supplies (Arcalas 2022; Atienza 2022).	Billions of unspent funds for the DepEd’s computerization programme (Chi 2024). ³
Inflation hit 8.7 per cent in January 2023, the highest rate in fourteen years (Desiderio 2023).	Failure to explain the use of DepEd’s confidential funds, worth PHP 112.5 million in 2023 (separate from the other confidential and intelligence funds used by the OVP) (Basilio 2024).
Expansion of Kadiwa and relaunch of the Masagana 99 programmes, which were seen more as an attempt to elicit nostalgia for his father (Cruz 2022) rather than to provide long-term solutions to agricultural issues.	Monthly distribution of envelopes allegedly containing PHP 12,000 to 50,000 to ranking DepEd officials (Gutierrez 2025; Panti 2024).

The uphill battle that the Marcos Jr. administration is facing extends beyond the midterm elections. Marcos Jr. is actively campaigning for eleven senatorial candidates, originally twelve before his sibling Imee dropped out. This slate, called the *Alyansa para sa Bagong Pilipinas* (Alliance for a New Philippines), is set to compete against Sara Duterte's *DuterteTEN*, a group of ten senatorial candidates whom she expected to count on for support should her impeachment trial, presided over by the Senate in July 2025, were to come to fruition. Instead, the Supreme Court voided the impeachment of Sara Duterte on 25 July 2025.

While Marcos Jr. and his allies anticipated retaining a majority in the Senate, it remains uncertain what kind of realignments will take place if there are renewed impeachment efforts against the vice president in February 2026. This looming political conflict underscores the delicate balance of power between the two factions. The tension surrounding their dynastic ambitions, particularly with the potential for a Senate trial, further exacerbates their already strained political relationship, leaving the administration susceptible to instability and political maneuvering in the future.

The Duterte brand, long associated with political strength, had been facing a decline due to allegations of Vice President Duterte's misuse of confidential funds, illegal disbursement of funds within the DepEd, and what has been described as a "trail of corruption" (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility 2024). However, this trend shifted dramatically following the arrest of former President Duterte by the ICC for crimes against humanity related to his war on drugs. The waning popularity of the Duterte family, particularly that of Sara Duterte, reversed in an unexpected turn of events.

Images of former President Duterte's arrest upon his return to Manila from Hong Kong, coupled with a massive online disinformation campaign (Mcpherson 2025), ignited a surge of public sympathy for him and his family. This surge of support has helped reinforce their stronghold in Davao City, as evidenced by his overwhelming mayoral victory in the 2025 midterm elections from his prison cell. It is uncertain if a similar show of support will be extended to Duterte's former Philippine National Police Chief and now Senator, Ronald Bato Dela Rosa, who is reported to be in hiding and has not been visible in

the Senate and has not participated in a bicameral conference for the 2026 national budget (Sigales 2025). The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) announced that the International Criminal Court has a warrant out for his arrest. Dela Rosa, a close associate of Rodrigo Duterte even when he was still mayor of Davao City, is largely considered one of the key enforcers of Duterte's war on drugs from 2016 to 2022. This includes allegations of nationwide extrajudicial killings of suspected drug users and peddlers.

There was never any strong demand for accountability for the war on drugs. In fact, Duterte ended his tenure as president with a satisfaction rating of +81 per cent, even as his administration boasted of extrajudicial killings and a poor response to the pandemic (Lalu 2022). The combination of a slow vaccine procurement and rollout, little to no economic activity due to the strict lockdown, and a healthcare system that could barely attend to patients led to the Philippines having the "highest cumulative COVID-19 cases and deaths in the Western-Pacific" (Uy et al. 2022, p. 1). Yet, the public was able to look past that. Given their strong base of support, it is unlikely that the Duterte dynasty's political influence will wither anytime soon (Calimbahin 2025). In Davao City, there are five Duterte family members who occupy key local positions (Arguillas 2024). A Duterte relative is also contesting a party-list seat, and two Duterte-aligned politicians are likely to secure re-election to the Senate. However, unless the Dutertes succeed in expanding their Senate alliances, they are unlikely to exert decisive influence over any forthcoming impeachment proceedings against Vice President Sara Duterte. Renewed efforts are expected once the Supreme Court's ruling lapses on 6 February 2026.

By overplaying their hand in former President Duterte's ICC arrest, letting it take place before the elections, allies of Marcos Jr. find themselves working even more to ensure that administration-backed candidates dominate the senatorial race. House Speaker Romualdez allegedly distributed "ayuda" (financial assistance funds) to lawmakers who joined his campaign sorties (Serquiña 2025). And the much-touted PHP 20 per kilo of rice was suddenly rolled out by the National Food Authority, only to be asked by the Commission on Elections to stop its rollout until after the elections (Casucian 2025). One way the Marcos Jr. administration can curb the rising influence of the Dutertes is to

support the candidacy of reformist candidates who were, in a way, won over when the government of Marcos Jr. cooperated with the arrest of Duterte in the ICC.

The 2025 elections have also raised issues of foreign interference. Although not new, this same concern was raised in the 2016 national elections, and some candidates have decried the interference of China in the digital space. Troll farms supposedly hired by an advertising agency paid for by China have sown negative social media posts against candidates asserting Philippine sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea (Cayabyab 2025). Likewise, a Chinese national was nabbed outside the Commission on Elections' head office in a van with wiretapping and listening equipment (Channel News Asia 2025). It is worth noting the kinds of narratives peddled and whether there are candidates who are most likely to benefit from the messages coming from these troll farms.

The Philippines is the oldest democracy in Asia. While there are a lot of elements of continuity, there are also nuances, changes and slight pivots of change in the politics, economics and societal issues in the country. These pivots and changes may not necessarily bring better politics or development or greater equality, given the structural issues that are deeply embedded. This volume brings together the various expertise and experience of Filipino scholars to provide a timely discussion on the different contemporary and historical issues of the country. The book is useful for individuals and institutions closely following Philippine politics, economics and society.

The end of Rodrigo Duterte's violent populist rule ushered in the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., with Sara Duterte as vice president. Although their relationship has since devolved into open rivalry, it is important to recall that both leaders emerge from deeply entrenched political dynasties. As children of former presidents with long careers in local politics, they embody the persistence—and intensification—of dynastic entrenchment in Philippine politics, now marked by heightened competition at the very apex of the state.

In this context, governance has increasingly taken a back seat as allies of the chief executive prioritise the impeachment of the most formidable contender for the 2028 presidential election. State resources are shored up and dispensed to secure loyalty among powerful dynastic families in Congress and key figures in the Senate, placing political survival above institutional reform. This is particularly striking given

that a rare window for long-term reform has emerged amid revelations of systemic corruption in flood control and mitigation projects.

The creation of the Independent Commission for Infrastructure, the appointment of a new Ombudsman, and greater transparency in national budget deliberations represent steps in the right direction. Yet their impact will depend on sustained commitment, insulation from partisan politics, and genuine resolve to curb entrenched corruption. Public expectations for accountability remain high, but they coexist with deep scepticism shaped by enduring impunity. Under the Marcos–Duterte administration, Philippine governance continues to be defined by elite capture operating within weakened institutions.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Firmly situating the volume within the evolving domestic landscape of the Marcos Jr. administration at its midway point in 2025, we invited contributors to critically assess key policy dynamics, achievements and challenges across political, economic and sociocultural spheres, offering insights into their broader implications for the trajectory of the Philippines in the first half of the twenty-first century.

This perspective is particularly timely, as the administration’s technocratic ambitions have frequently been overshadowed by political theatrics—most notably, the Marcos–Duterte feud, Duterte’s ICC arrest and the intense manoeuvring ahead of the 2025 midterms. While the 2025 midterm elections have provided a moderate boost to the Marcos Jr. administration, ongoing dynastic rivalries and shifting political factions will continue to influence the remainder of his term. These dynamics will play a significant role in shaping the competition among political families for the 2028 presidential race.

Against this backdrop, what do the individual contributions in this volume offer? Authors were selected for their expertise and were invited to provide informed analyses on five critical policy areas.

Part I sets the stage by examining the broader political, economic and environmental landscape under the Marcos Jr. administration, offering essential context for the discussions that follow.

- *Carmel V. Abao* analyses the fractured Marcos–Duterte alliance and its implications for the 2025 midterms and 2028 presidential

race. Using Mark Thompson's framework of populism, clientelism and bourgeois-led reformism, the chapter examines shifts in governance and policy continuity from Duterte to Marcos Jr. It questions the administration's ability to enact meaningful reforms as political survival strategies take precedence over long-term policymaking.

- *Jan Carlo Punongbayan* evaluates the economic trajectory from 2022 to 2024, highlighting slow recovery, inflation, underemployment and fiscal strain. He critiques Marcos Jr.'s focus on symbolic gestures, such as reviving Marcos Sr.-era programmes, over structural reforms. The chapter warns that recent budgetary manoeuvres could undermine development goals and argues for policies that promote agricultural modernization, education reform, fiscal transparency and climate resilience.
- *Kristian Karlo Saguin* examines the Philippines' transition to renewable energy, highlighting the challenges of overcoming the country's coal dependency. While recent administrations have promoted renewables, entrenched private interests continue to sustain reliance on coal-fired plants. The chapter assesses investment shifts, regulatory challenges and the social and environmental trade-offs in the evolving energy landscape.
- *Marites Dañguilan Vitug* explores the dramatic shifts in Philippine foreign policy, from Duterte's pro-China approach to Marcos Jr.'s pivot back to the US and its allies. While Duterte sidelined the 2016 arbitral ruling in favour of secret deals with Beijing, Marcos Jr. has reaffirmed defence ties with Washington, sparking heightened tensions in the West Philippine Sea. The chapter assesses the geopolitical and strategic implications of these changes and underscores the need for a long-term foreign policy strategy.

Part II examines how historical distortion, disinformation and memory politics have shaped both the Marcos family's return to power and grassroots resistance. It highlights the role of public memory, digital misinformation and political activism in shaping the contemporary struggle over truth and historical accountability.

- *Jocelyn S. Martin* explores how the Marcoses' political resurgence cannot be attributed to a single factor like historical revisionism or nostalgia, but rather to a broader interplay of remembering

and forgetting. She examines how cultural institutions, selective erasure, politicized nostalgia and habit memory have sustained the Marcos legacy. As part of this analysis, the chapter also engages with generational shifts, post-memory and the psychological mechanisms of trauma and forgetting in the Global South. Ultimately, it calls for civil society to play an active role as “memory agents” in reclaiming historical narratives and countering organized efforts at historical distortion.

- *Michael D. Pante* analyses the weaponization of disinformation through three interconnected tactics—historical distortion, fake news and red-baiting—that have been used to manipulate public discourse and suppress dissent under both Duterte and Marcos Jr. He argues that these methods have not only spread falsehoods but also served as precursors to political harassment, including arrests, abductions and extrajudicial killings. He argues that while Marcos Jr. presents a more measured public rhetoric compared to Duterte, the underlying strategies of repression and political control remain intact, particularly in counterinsurgency campaigns. The chapter examines how disinformation fosters fear, weakens political opposition, and normalizes state-sponsored violence. It also discusses current initiatives to combat digital disinformation and historical distortion, emphasizing the urgent need for a collective societal response to safeguard democratic space.
- *Soliman M. Santos, Jr.* reflects on his decades of engagement with activist communities, focusing on the intersection of memory, insurgency and political struggle in the Philippines. Drawing from his work on activism and martial law, he examines how historical memory shapes contemporary political movements and discusses the need for revolutionary movements to reflect critically on their histories, including past mistakes. The chapter also advocates for an inclusive and regionally grounded approach to Philippine history to ensure that grassroots narratives are preserved. Santos emphasizes that historical honesty is crucial for both democratic institutions and revolutionary movements aiming to challenge the status quo. As the Marcos Jr. administration reshapes historical narratives, he stresses the importance of documenting, critically analysing and preserving memory as tools of resistance against historical erasure.

Part III examines how oligarchic politics in the Philippines have evolved, focusing on elite families' continued dominance in governance, policymaking and business. The section explores constitutional reform, intra-dynastic competition, corporate-political ties and the increasing influence of billionaire families in shaping national policies.

- *Cristina Regina Bonoan and Björn Dressel* analyse the Marcos Jr. administration's push for constitutional reform, highlighting how oligarchic interests influence the debate. They argue that while these reforms are presented as efforts for change, the support and opposition to them are often driven by elite agendas. Paradoxically, it is this competition among political families that helps maintain the resilience of the existing 1987 Constitution.
- *Marianne Juco Rodriguez* provides a quantitative analysis of political family ties within the corporate sector. Her study finds that 22 per cent of corporations in the Philippines have connections to political incumbents, with over half tied to established political clans. She also reveals that these politically connected firms are particularly dominant in regulated sectors, benefitting from election-related growth and economic stability during recessions, though their impact on competition remains inconclusive.
- *Antoinette R. Raquiza* examines how the richest business families, after the 1987 return to democracy, have privatized governance. By acquiring state assets and securing contracts, they now dominate sectors like infrastructure, utilities and public services. The rise of the Private Sector Advisory Council under Marcos Jr. exemplifies how these oligarchs now directly influence policymaking, consolidating their power and contributing to a system of "oligarchic democracy".
- *Athena Charanne Presto* explores contrasting political strategies of Imee and Bongbong Marcos. While Bongbong focuses on projecting himself as a national statesman, benefitting from his family's local roots, Imee adopts a more traditional, locally focused approach while expanding her national influence. Their divergent strategies reflect personal ambitions within the Marcos dynasty and underline the adaptability of dynastic politics, especially as their influence extends beyond the current administration.

Part IV explores the challenges and opportunities shaping the Philippine economy, focusing on agriculture and infrastructure investment as critical areas for sustained growth.

- *Joseph J. Capuno* evaluates the *Build Build Build* and *Build Better More* infrastructure programmes initiated under the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations. Despite ambitious goals, both programmes have faced delays, cost overruns and poor institutional oversight, hindering their effectiveness. Drawing from over 340 major projects between 2001 and 2023, the chapter identifies governance and coordination failures as key barriers to successful implementation. Capuno suggests policy reforms to improve accountability, inter-agency collaboration and long-term infrastructure planning.
- *Fermin D. Adriano* explores the underperformance of the Philippine agricultural sector, which, despite employing a significant portion of the labour force, contributes the least to gross domestic product (GDP) and exports. The sector's stagnation has resulted in rural poverty, high food prices and widespread malnutrition, particularly among children. Adriano argues that addressing these issues requires structural transformation, including increased investment, enhanced productivity and policy reforms aimed at fostering a more resilient and equitable agricultural economy.

Part V explores key emerging challenges in the Philippines, including diaspora engagement in politics, fiscal decentralization, climate adaptation and development in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

- *Weena Gera* assesses the *Mandanas-Garcia* ruling, which aimed to expand local government revenues but has led to governance inefficiencies and fiscal strains. Gera argues that the ruling created disparities, benefitting wealthier regions more than poorer ones. As a result, she advocates for a balanced approach to fiscal decentralization that empowers local governments while ensuring national oversight, promoting more equitable and efficient resource allocation.
- *Earvin Charles B. Cabalquinto* examines the political engagement of older Filipinos in Australia through digital media. Using a

multi-sited ethnographic approach, he explores how digital infrastructures shape their perceptions of the Marcos Jr. administration. Cabalquinto highlights how material conditions and emotional experiences influence political participation, revealing how transnational media consumption reshapes democratic engagement and allows Filipinos abroad to participate politically, navigating identity, belonging and political narratives.

- *Acram Latiph* explores the development challenges in BARMM, focusing on the weak private sector's impact on poverty, political violence and bureaucratic inefficiency. Latiph argues that a lack of economic opportunities outside government positions perpetuates political dynasties and conflict. He stresses the need to strengthen the private sector, addressing political monopolies to foster economic stability, reduce reliance on government positions and promote sustainable growth and peace in the region.
- *Justin See* critiques the climate adaptation paradox in the Philippines, where vulnerabilities persist despite progressive policies. He identifies barriers such as externalizing climate risks, portraying the poor as both victims and perpetrators, and focusing on infrastructure-led solutions. See calls for a shift towards climate justice and human-centred strategies that address structural inequalities, advocating for solutions that integrate social and environmental justice alongside technical adaptation measures.

CONCLUSION

As this volume demonstrates, the Marcos Jr. administration's performance in the midterm elections highlights the growing fragmentation of elite alliances, policy drift driven by dynastic rivalries and the persistent failure to address the country's long-standing structural challenges. By situating these developments within the broader context of elite consolidation and institutional fragility, the chapters offer a more grounded understanding of governance under Marcos Jr. Beyond policy shifts and electoral maneuvering, several contributions also explore the enduring influence of the past—investigating how memory, historical revisionism and fears of a return to authoritarianism under Marcos Sr. continue to shape public discourse and political decisions today. Collectively, these contributions emphasize that the administration's

trajectory is less defined by coherent reform and more by the dynamics of survival within a fractured, oligarchic political system. Emerging from the divisive 2025 midterms and a scale of corruption cases unseen before, the country faces not only increased electoral contestation but also deeper questions about the future of its democracy and its ability to deliver meaningful outcomes for its citizens.

Notes

1. During the 2022 campaign, Sara Duterte publicly voiced her preference to lead the Department of National Defense (Galvez 2022). However, her appointment as Secretary of Education (rather than the preferred defense portfolio), along with the demotion of president-turned-Pampanga 2nd District Representative Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (whom Sara regards as her mentor) from senior deputy speaker to one of nine deputy speakers, were among the major factors that led to the UniTeam fallout.
2. Correspondence with Manolo Quezon, 9 April 2025.
3. Under Duterte's leadership, the DepEd only spent PHP 2.75 billion out of the PHP 11 billion allocated for the computerization programme in 2023 (Chi 2024).

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