



Center for Asian Democracy

Republic of the Philippines

2022 Pre-Election Report

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*Cover image: Candidates at 2022 Presidential Debate: Philippines News Agency, March 2022



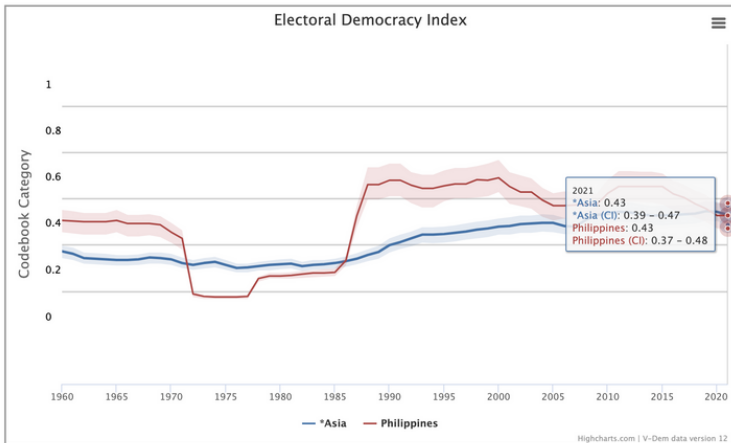
Country Profile

Overview

The Republic of the Philippines is a representative democracy in Southeast Asia with a population of over 114 million people. The country is a constitutional republic, with a powerful presidency, bicameral legislature, and independent judiciary. Its constitution can be reviewed [here](#).

Measures of Democracy

The Philippines has a robust democratic history, but has experienced significant recent weakening in the quality of its institutions. [V-Dem measures of electoral and liberal democracy](#) visualize this point. After rating well above the average for the rest of Asia after the 1986 People Power Revolution, the Philippines has recently declined markedly, becoming essentially indistinguishable from the rest of Asia. This volatility over the course of fifty years is a sharp contrast to the pattern of slow improvement across Asia as a whole during that period.



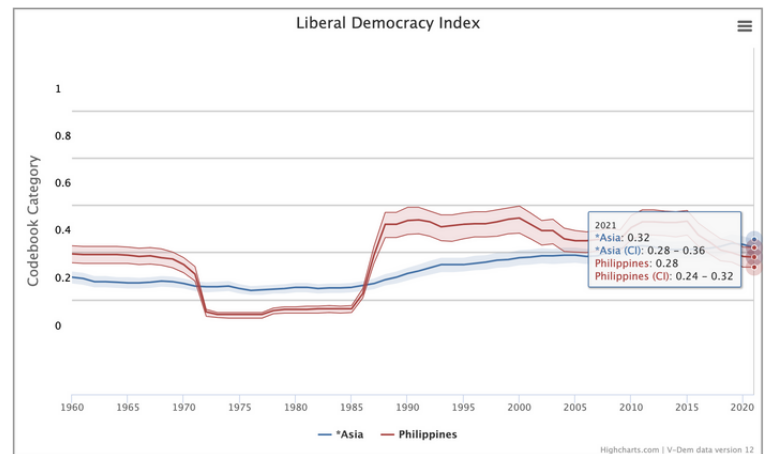
Media Freedom

Press freedom in the Philippines remains a persistent source of weakness in liberal rights in the country. After some improvement under former president Aquino, press freedom ratings have deteriorated in recent years.

Ranking since 2013

| Year | Ranking | Change | Year | Ranking | Change |
|------|-----------|--------|------|-----------|--------|
| 2021 | 138 / 180 | ↓ | 2016 | 138 / 180 | ↑ |
| 2020 | 136 / 180 | ↓ | 2015 | 141 / 180 | ↑ |
| 2019 | 134 / 180 | ↓ | 2014 | 149 / 180 | ↓ |
| 2018 | 133 / 180 | ↓ | 2013 | 147 / 180 | = |
| 2017 | 127 / 180 | ↑ | | | |

(Reporters without Borders, 2021)



Election Profile: President of the Republic of the Philippines

While the 2022 Philippine election involves various levels and branches of government, the most closely watched race is for the country's powerful presidency, which will be contested via a simple first-past-the-post system. Given the weakness of political parties in the country, profiles below generally center on individual candidates. While President Rodrigo Duterte is prohibited by term limits from seeking a second consecutive period in office, his approval ratings remain high. He has, thus far, avoided a formal endorsement. His daughter, Sara Duterte, is a leading candidate for the vice presidency.

Leading Candidates and Parties

Pre-election polls indicate that Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr, a former Senator, is the frontrunner for the presidency. Marcos Jr. is the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, whose regime was overthrown in the peaceful “People Power” revolution of 1986. Marcos Jr. is running in partnership with Sara Duterte for the vice presidency. Marcos Jr. has campaigned on themes of national unity, but attracted controversy on the campaign trail for efforts to rehabilitate the legacy of the authoritarian period.

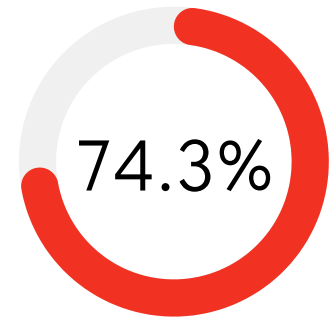
Polls show that Marcos Jr's strongest challenge comes from current-Vice President Leni Robredo. Robredo defeated Marcos Jr. in a razor-close 2016 vice presidential election. As vice president, Robredo was critical of the weakening of liberal rights under Duterte's leadership, and has campaigned on protecting the legacy of the 1986 democratic revolution.

Manila Mayor “Isko” Moreno is another prominent candidate. A charismatic former television star, Moreno has campaigned on bringing his experience in local government management and social development to the national stage.

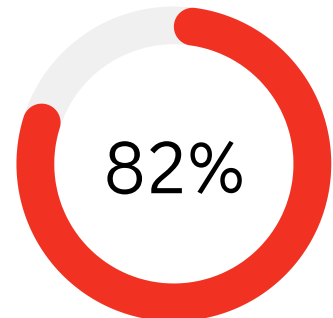
Current Senator, and world-famous boxer, Manny Pacquiao is also contesting the office. Pacquiao is most notable for his socially conservative positions on sexuality, even by the generally conservative standards of Philippine politics.

Other candidates, notably Senator “Ping” Lacson, a former police official, and labor leader “Leody” de Guzman have generally shown more limited support in opinion surveys. In a fragmented, first-past-the-post election, even candidates with a smaller base of support may prove important in the eventual result.

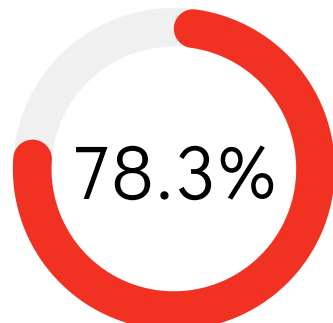
Recent Voter Turnout



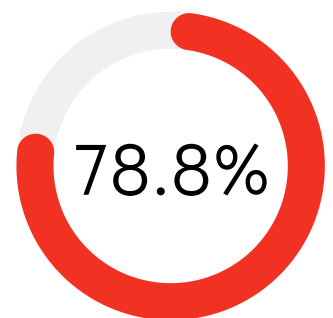
2019 Legislative Elections



2016 Presidential Elections



Average Legislative Turnout (1967 -)



Average Presidential Turnout (1998 -)

Public Attitudes Regarding Democracy

The 2019 [World Values Survey](#) captures Filipino attitudes about democratic institutions. This brief section highlights representative indicators from the most recent WVS polling on attitudes toward democracy, liberal rights, and institutional rights.

Democracy

| How Democratically is this Country Being Governed Today? | |
|--|------------|
| Rating | Percentage |
| Not at all democratic | 4.3 |
| 2 | 2.4 |
| 3 | 3.0 |
| 4 | 3.7 |
| 5 | 17.1 |
| 6 | 11.7 |
| 7 | 14.0 |
| 8 | 14.7 |
| 9 | 10.0 |
| Completely democratic | 19.3 |
| (N) | (1,200) |
| Mean | 6.86 |
| Desviación típica | 2.45 |
| N | (1,200) |

| How Important is Democracy to You? | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Rating | Percentage |
| Not at all important | 4.1 |
| 2 | 2.1 |
| 3 | 2.2 |
| 4 | 2.9 |
| 5 | 12.2 |
| 6 | 8.5 |
| 7 | 8.9 |
| 8 | 14.4 |
| 9 | 12.2 |
| Absolutely important | 32.5 |
| (N) | (1,200) |
| Mean | 7.51 |
| Desviación típica | 2.55 |
| N | (1,200) |

Filipinos generally report positive views of the current democratic governance of the country, with most values falling in the upper-half of the scale. With that said, only 19% believed the country was totally democratic in 2019. Filipinos also report high personal importance of democracy, although the mean value (7.51) does lag a bit behind regional democracies like Indonesia (8.23) and Malaysia (8.19).

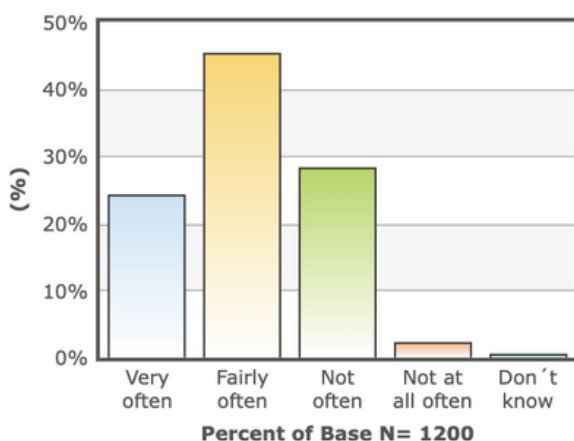
All tables via [World Values Survey Online Analysis](#).

Liberal Rights

When asked about the necessity of protecting civil rights as a characteristic of democracy, most respondents placed themselves in the top half of the scale of agreement. However, the country's average score on this indicator (6.39) did trail well behind some other Asian democracies, including Indonesia (7.92) and South Korea (7.2).

| Civil Rights Protect people's liberty against oppression | |
|--|-----------|
| Rating | % / Total |
| Not an essential characteristic of democracy | 5.8 |
| 2 | 3.3 |
| 3 | 5.1 |
| 4 | 5.0 |
| 5 | 19.9 |
| 6 | 11.6 |
| 7 | 12.3 |
| 8 | 11.4 |
| 9 | 7.5 |
| An essential characteristic of democracy | 17.6 |
| No answer | 0.1 |
| (N) | (1,200) |
| Mean | 6.39 |
| Desviación típica | 2.62 |
| N | (1,198) |

How often in country's elections: Election officials are fair



Confidence in Electoral Institutions

Trust in election officials to be impartial administrators of democracy is key for democratic legitimacy, and high in the country even by regional standards. According to the WVS data, 69.4% of Filipinos believe that election officials are fair either often or very often. This compares favorably with wealthier regional democracies in South Korea (72%) and Taiwan (70%).

Challenges to Democratic Institutions

Although the Philippines has a proud history of post-independence democracy, it faces long-standing challenges. These include the weakness of political parties, entrenched power of political dynasties, regular occurrence of election-related violence, widespread allegations of vote-buying, and several attempted coups involving elements of security services. Without minimizing these challenges, the Philippines is also noteworthy for mobilizing several hundred thousand domestic citizen election observers on polling day through civil society organizations like the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV).

If these concerns are endemic to democracy in the country, newer challenges have been more directly tied to the illiberal presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. Most notably, Duterte has presided over a “drug war” that human rights groups allege has resulted in thousands of extrajudicial killings, and has attracted scrutiny from the International Criminal Court. Duterte and his administration have jailed opposition leader Senator Leila de Lima since 2017 and pursued legal charges against journalists, notably 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa. Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, a Duterte critic, was forced from office in 2018, and sedition charges have been filed against numerous civil society organizations and religious leaders critical of the government.

Online disinformation is among the newest challenges to democracy in the country. Facebook's public policy director for global elections has referred to the country as “patient zero” in the use of online disinformation for electoral gain. The 2016 Duterte campaign gained international notoriety for the use of fake news and paid online trolls as it cruised to victory. This pattern continued in office, with regular online harassment of administration critics. The 2022 campaign shows that this challenge will outlast Duterte's term in office, with, among other examples, an allegedly “deepfake” sexual video involving a family member of a leading candidate.



Logo of one of the Philippines' election monitoring networks



Maria Ressa's Nobel Prize Address
Source: Reuters/Heiko Junge



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

“The Truth Will Set You Free” (John 8:32)

A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the peace of Jesus be ours. He who said:
“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

As we commemorate the EDSA People Power Revolution this February 25, the day we reclaimed our freedom, we call upon you brothers and sisters, whatever your political color or status in society.

We are aware of the complexity of things, especially in the area of politics, as well as our different views. The present state of division among us due to politics, is unfortunate. **Yet, we hope all of us consider the common good as foremost concern. Let us respect one another: - not giving in to hatred and rash judgments. Let us diligently seek the truth that we may do what is right and avoid evil.**

The Catholic Bishops' Election Statement on
Disinformation

Source: [CBCP News](#)

Elections in the Time of COVID

The Philippines conducted extensive, long-lasting lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and has only recently begun to emerge from this turbulent period. The country’s election management body, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), has promulgated various regulations on campaign activity and the conduct of elections that are intended to minimize risks that the election could contribute to COVID’s resurgence in the country. After a delay, the country conducted a generally successful regional plebiscite in 2021, which provides some valuable learning. But observers have raised concerns that the scale of a national election will pose unique challenges, particularly in implementation of policies.

COMELEC has taken various steps, often based on learning from other Asian elections during the pandemic in places like South Korea, with the goal of minimizing public health risk from the election season. Campaign activities face restrictions depending on the localized status of an area under the country’s COVID alert level system. Rallies and motorcades may face capacity limits, and there are restrictions on popular practices like taking selfies and distributing food and drinks. On election day itself, polling places will keep longer hours to reduce crowding, and domestic citizen election monitors have moved the country’s transparency server to a large university arena in order to preserve social distancing among volunteers. Poll watchers must be fully vaccinated. Well over 1 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) play an important part in the country’s politics, and COMELEC has altered overseas voting procedures depending on local conditions.

A concern is that, in spite of these efforts, COVID will negatively impact both election day and public health. Data indicate, for instance, that new voter registration lags what would have been expected by almost 50%. COMELEC may face capacity challenges across the country’s vast election infrastructure. Reports already abound of campaign activities not abiding by stated policies. It is unclear if domestic election monitors will be able to mobilize several hundred thousand volunteers successfully in the midst of the pandemic.

| For In-person campaigning | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| CATEGORY 1 (ALERT LEVEL 1) | CATEGORY 2 (ALERT LEVEL 2) | CATEGORY 3 (ALERT LEVEL 3) |
| No limitations | A candidate or campaign leader may be accompanied by a maximum of five campaign staffers | A candidate or campaign leader may be accompanied by a maximum of three campaign staffers |

| Caucuses, meetings, convention, rallies | | |
|--|--|--|
| CATEGORY 1 (ALERT LEVEL 1) | CATEGORY 2 (ALERT LEVEL 2) | CATEGORY 3 (ALERT LEVEL 3) |
| 70% of capacity of the venue (indoor or outdoor) | 50% of capacity of the venue (indoor or outdoor) | 50% of capacity of the venue (enclosed or outdoor) |

| Motorcades and caravans | | |
|---|---|---|
| CATEGORY 1 (ALERT LEVEL 1) | CATEGORY 2 (ALERT LEVEL 2) | CATEGORY 3 (ALERT LEVEL 3) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trucks, buses, mini-trucks, and jeepneys: 70% of vehicle capacity Sports utility vehicles, sedans and private jeeps: Full capacity Tricycles: Full capacity Motorcycles: One passenger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trucks, buses, mini-trucks, and jeepneys: 50% of vehicle capacity Sports utility vehicles, sedans and private jeeps: Full capacity Tricycles: Full capacity Motorcycles: One passenger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trucks, buses, mini-trucks, and jeepneys: 50% of vehicle capacity SUVs, sedans, private jeeps: 2 passengers and 1 passenger on the driver's side Tricycles: 1 passenger, 1 passenger on the sidecar and 1 passenger on the back of motorcycle Motorcycles: One passenger |

SOURCE: COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS (COMELEC)

COVID-related campaign restrictions promulgated by COMELEC. Source: [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#)

Spotlight on the Campaign Trail

Supporters of Manny Pacquiao on the campaign trail

Source: Manny Pacquiao Public Information Facebook



Bobong Marcos campaign event.
Source: Philippine News Agency

Leni Robredo campaigns at Quezon Memorial Circle, Metro Manila.
February 2022

Source: Creative Commons/Patrickroque01



Further Reading

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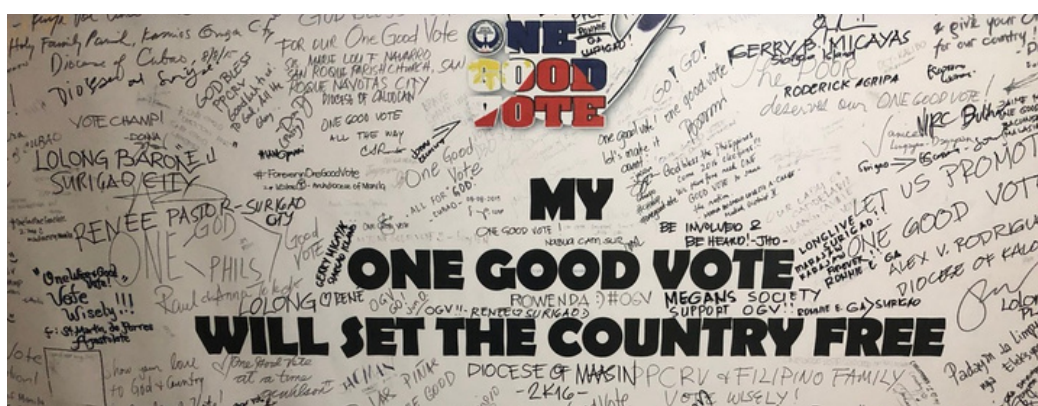
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About the Center for Asian Democracy

The mission of the Center for Asian Democracy, established at the University of Louisville in 2006, is to promote research and teaching about democracy and the prospects for democratization in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Through publications, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars programs, colloquia, and research projects in Asian countries, the Center creates a forum for studying political dynamics in this vital region. The Center is currently led by Interim Director, Dr. David Buckley, Paul Weber Chair of Politics, Science and Religion and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville.

About the Author

The substantive research of this report was conducted by CAD Undergraduate Research Fellow, Tristin Black, under the supervision of Dr. David Buckley. Tristin Black is a sophomore at the University of Louisville majoring in political science and pan-African studies. He is also a Brown Fellow at the University of Louisville, and his research interests include US foreign policy and democracy in Asia.

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