

## 2022 Philippines Presidential Election – Back to the Future?

The 2022 presidential race is going to be a two-horse race between former senator Bongbong Marcos and Vice-President Leni Robredo. Examining the platforms laid out during the campaign period, a Marcos presidency appears to be aligned with the incumbent government, while Robredo's governance trajectory is likely to counter several of the present administration's initiatives.

- Marcos intends to maintain warm ties with China despite an ongoing territorial dispute in the West Philippine Sea.
- Robredo, on the other hand, is bent on upholding the international tribunal ruling on the Philippines' territorial claim in the disputed area.
- Both presidential candidates vow to continue President Duterte's flagship 'Build, Build, Build' infrastructure program and carry on the campaign against illegal drugs sans the violent killings.
- The Marcos family's checkered past is a concern among critics as only a fraction of the estimated USD 10 billion ill-gotten wealth amassed by his family during the 20-year rule of its late patriarch has been recovered by the government.
- Critics of Robredo describe the vice-president as a mere puppet of the Liberal Party and showed poor leadership in her failure to establish a united opposition.

On May 9, 2022, over 67 million Filipinos will march to polling precincts to vote for the country's new leaders, including the topmost post held by President Rodrigo Duterte. Vying for the presidency are 10 candidates, but only two appear to be key contenders for the position based on presidential surveys conducted by local pollsters.

Former senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. has been consistently on top of presidential surveys, garnering over 50%, and in some polls even 60%, of the total sample population

polled. In the latest Pulse Asia Survey taken from February 18-23, Marcos garnered 56% of the total sample size.<sup>1</sup> The son of late strongman Ferdinand E. Marcos earlier ran for vice-president in 2016 and lost to incumbent Vice-President Leonor "Leni" Robredo, who is also gunning for the presidency.

Marcos is running under the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas (Federal Party of the Philippines), a party that was formed in 2018 by supporters of President Duterte that supported the latter's presidential campaign in 2016. Running alongside Marcos is presidential daughter and Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte.



Vice-president Leni Robredo, meanwhile, is Marcos' closest rival in polls. Robredo's performance in the same recent Pulse Asia survey puts her in second place with 24% voters' preference. The vice-president narrowly defeated Marcos in 2016, winning by a margin of less than 1% or about 270,000 votes.

Prior to becoming vice-president, Robredo served as a congresswoman in 2013, representing Camarines Sur's Third District. Her late husband, Jesse Robredo, was interior secretary from 2010 to 2012. Robredo ran for the vice-presidency under the Liberal Party alongside the party's presidential candidate Mar Roxas. Robredo is running as an independent candidate despite her being the party leader of the Liberal Party. Teaming up as vice-president of Robredo is Senator Francis Pangilinan.

2022 ELECTIONS: FIRST CHOICE PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE BY AGE GROUP March 17 - 21, 2022 / Philippines (In Percent)							
Base: Likely Voters, 99%							
Of the people on this list, whom would you vote for as PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES if the May 2022 elections were held today and they were candidates?	RP (100%)	AGE GROUP					
		18-24 (13%)	25-34 (19%)	35-44 (18%)	45-54 (21%)	55-64 (17%)	65 & up (13%)
MARCOS, BONGBONG (PFP)	56	57	63	61	54	54	41
ROBREDO, LENI (IND)	24	30	18	17	22	29	37
DOMAGOSO, ISKO MORENO (AKSYON)	8	6	8	8	11	7	6
PACQUIAO, MANNY PACMAN (PROMDI)	6	4	7	9	6	3	8
LACSON, PING (PDR)	2	0	2	2	3	2	3
MANGONDATO, FAISAL (KTPNAN)	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
ABELLA, ERNIE (IND)	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
MONTEMAYOR, JOSE JR. (DPP)	0.05	0	0	0	0	0	0
DE GUZMAN, LEODY (PLM)	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0
GONZALES, NORBERTO (PDSP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>UNAIDED</u>							
Don't Know/Refused/None	3	1	1	2	4	3	5

Trailing behind Marcos and Robredo are Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, Senator Manny Pacquiao, and Senator Panfilo Lacson. Moreno averages around 10% in presidential surveys, while Pacquiao and Lacson garner around 8% and 5%, respectively.

Although popularity polls only consider a small fraction of the electorate, outcomes of their surveys towards the end of the campaign period mirrored the actual presidential results. Hence, it appears the race to the presidency is primarily between Marcos and Robredo. A prospective Marcos presidency has raised concerns of a return of an era reminiscent of his father, while a Robredo presidency could mean a return of a party that is lorded by personalities that have ousted the Marcoses but have proved to be inept and lackluster in governance. And with a little over a week left before election day, it is prudent to look at these two figures' predilections on domestic and international issues confronting the country should they end up winning the presidency.

## Marcos – Robredo Platforms

A win by either of the top two contenders in the presidential race would mean different things for the Philippines. Marcos and Robredo have varying stance on key issues such as economy, foreign policy, human rights, and pandemic response.

	Economy	Foreign Policy	Human Rights/ Pandemic Response
Bongbong Marcos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Tax rationalization</li> <li>▪ Increase budget for MSMEs</li> <li>▪ Strengthen agriculture and transport sectors</li> <li>▪ Continue BBB Program</li> <li>▪ Increase renewable energy utilization</li> <li>▪ Modernization of ferry transportation system</li> <li>▪ Intensify urban planning</li> <li>▪ Faster low-cost housing approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will not assert international arbitration court ruling on the Philippines' claim of West Philippine Sea</li> <li>▪ Maintain friendly ties with China</li> <li>▪ Maintain Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the US</li> <li>▪ Initially said Philippines need not to make a stance in Russia-Ukraine war but later called on Russia to respect Ukraine's freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue War on Drugs campaign but focus on prevention and rehabilitation</li> <li>▪ International Criminal Court (ICC) has no jurisdiction in the Philippines</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Jab-to-job' program: Vaccinate people and get people back to job.</li> <li>▪ No more lockdowns.</li> <li>▪ Increase healthcare budget and medical research spend</li> </ul>
Leni Robredo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Level playing field to do business</li> <li>▪ Maintain predictable regulatory regime</li> <li>▪ Public-private partnership in critical infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Increased healthcare capacity</li> <li>▪ Lower electricity rates, transition to renewable energy</li> <li>▪ Improve water resources management, public transportation, and rural development</li> <li>▪ Develop new industries and promote IT-KPO</li> <li>▪ Boost local agriculture budget</li> <li>▪ Increase education budget</li> <li>▪ Lower borrowing costs for MSMEs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arbitral ruling on West Philippine Sea is non-negotiable</li> <li>▪ Strengthen ties with the US</li> <li>▪ Build stronger ties in Southeast Asia, the European Union, the UK, Australia, and other countries where there are large concentrations of Filipino migrant workers</li> <li>▪ Condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pursue a comprehensive war on drugs sans brutal killings.</li> <li>▪ Shun a militaristic approach to insurgency</li> <li>▪ Protection of indigenous peoples</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fill the gaps in the government's Covid-19 response during her first 100 days in office</li> <li>▪ Pay all government debt to hospitals</li> <li>▪ Distribution of cash aid</li> </ul>

**Ferdinand Marcos Jr.:** Marcos is running alongside presidential daughter Sara Duterte, which has effectively consolidated political parties that are supportive of both President Duterte and the Marcos family. The pair's tandem, dubbed as UniTeam, also has the support of the country's biggest and oldest political groups including those of former president Gloria Arroyo and Joseph Estrada. It has also recently received support from President Duterte's party, which described Marcos as the candidate whose platform is most aligned with the president's development program.<sup>ii</sup> President Duterte, however, has yet to make an official endorsement of his chosen presidential candidate after long-time aide Senator Bong Go dropped out of the presidential race.

**Economic Programs:** Marcos intends to continue President Duterte's projects and reforms. Marcos likewise espoused rationalizing taxes and allocating portions of the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), strengthening the country's agriculture and transport sector, and continuing President Duterte's 'Build, Build, Build' infrastructure program.<sup>iii</sup>

Marcos believes agricultural programs must go beyond planting rice, but also extend to R&D, searching for resilient varieties, supporting farmers in securing loans, and accessing agricultural products such as fertilizers and pesticides. He likewise underscored the need for mechanization to lower production costs and the need for small farms to achieve scale by setting up more cooperatives.

Marcos attributes the lack of capital-intensive investments in the Philippines to the high cost of electricity which he said creates the case for more renewable energy. The former senator added that the country's infrastructure development program must now include digital and power infrastructure. Senator Marcos also proposes for the modernization of ferry transportation system and committed to support the proposed Pasig River Ferry Convergence Program. The presidential aspirant also said his government plans to intensify urban planning and revisit the country's spillway system,<sup>iv</sup> as well as expedite low-cost housing loans to as quick as seven days.<sup>v</sup>

**Foreign Policy:** On foreign policy, Marcos maintains a safe and careful stance with the Philippines' relations with China and the US. In one of his public statements, Marcos said he would keep things friendly with both countries in the event of a conflict between the two. He said he will not discontinue the country's Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the US. Like President Duterte, Marcos said he will not enforce the Hague ruling on the West Philippine Sea and would instead pursue a bilateral agreement with China over the contested waters to avoid the possibility of waging war.<sup>vi</sup>

On the issue over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Marcos earlier said he sees no need for the Philippines to take a stance on the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but later called on Russia to respect Ukraine's freedom and appeal for a peaceful resolution to the ongoing armed conflict between the two countries.<sup>vii</sup>

#### Notable laws passed by Bongbong Marcos as Senator (authored/co-authored/co-sponsored)

- Cybercrime Law
- National Health Insurance Act
- Anti-drunk and drugged driving Act
- Student Athletes Protection Act
- PAGASA Modernization Act
- Right of Way Act
- Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act
- Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act

**Human Rights:** The former senator said he will continue Duterte's "war on drugs" but would take a different tack to it, stressing prevention and rehabilitation. Marcos said that while Duterte's administration's focused only on the enforcement side, his government's focus will be on prevention, educating the youth on the ill-effects of drugs and improving rehabilitation centers. When asked whether Duterte officials accused of committing crimes against humanity over the "war on drugs" campaign should be taken before the International Criminal Court (ICC), Marcos takes the same stance as Duterte that the ICC has no jurisdiction over the country.<sup>viii</sup>

**Pandemic Response:** Marcos described his Covid-19 response program as "jab to job," with the goal of vaccinating the population against the coronavirus and get the people back to their jobs. According to Marcos there will be no more lockdowns because the Filipinos cannot do another round of it. When asked whether he would order mandatory vaccination against Covid-19, he said he will continue the vaccination drive but will not force people who refuse to be vaccinated.<sup>ix</sup> Marcos likewise expressed plans to increase budget for healthcare and medical research as part of his pandemic recovery plans and cited the need to strengthen the country's main COVID-19 laboratory, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) and the University of the Philippines' National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (BIOTECH).<sup>x</sup>

**Leni Robredo:** Leni Robredo is the incumbent vice-president and is the chairperson of the opposition Liberal Party. Robredo, however, is running as an independent candidate in a coalition with the Liberal Party to allow other political groups to support her candidacy. Newly formed opposition coalition 1Sambayan, which comprises former government officials, opposition politicians, and other interest groups, is endorsing Robredo's candidacy. Robredo is a staunch critic of President Duterte and has been particularly critical about the latter's controversial war on drugs campaign. She is opposed, among other things, to Duterte's plan to bring back the death penalty and his decision to allow the remains of former president Ferdinand Marcos to be buried at the national heroes' cemetery. Robredo served briefly as head of the government's housing and development agency but was forced out of office after she was excluded from the meetings of Duterte's cabinet.

**Economic Programs:** Among the economic priorities laid out by Robredo in her public appearances and interviews include fostering a level playing field to do business, a predictable regulatory regime, public-private partnership (PPP) in critical infrastructure areas, increased health-care capacity, a road map to lower electricity costs, and make the transition to renewable energy. Priority areas in Robredo's PPP program include water resources management, public transport and rural development, and reconstruction of public infrastructure and housing projects in calamity-stricken areas.

**Laws passed by Leni Robredo, as Congresswoman, (authored/co-authored/co-sponsored)**

- Philippine National Railways Charter Extension
- Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015
- Tax Incentives Management and Transparency Act
- Open High School System Act
- Graphic Health Warnings Law
- Decriminalizing Premature Marriage
- Strengthening the Probation System
- Anti-Discrimination Bill

Also given emphasis in Robredo's economic platform is the reactivation of the Philippines' manufacturing sector. Robredo vows to develop new industries and to make the Philippines a center for next-generation IT-KPO (Information Technology-Knowledge process outsourcing) services. In agriculture, Robredo vowed to double the government's budget to the sector to at least PHP 116 billion in her first year of office. The vice-president highlighted the need to fund more climate-friendly



crops which farmers can harvest, depending on conditions in their provinces and pushed infrastructure development in the sector to spur rural development for farmers.

Robredo has likewise expressed plans to increase education spending by as much a 6% of the country's GDP and vowed to protect and give more support to the fisheries sector, and lowering overall cost of borrowings for micro, small and medium enterprises.

**Foreign Policy:** Robredo intends to pursue trade and investment deals with China but its recognition of the historic arbitral ruling saying the Philippines owns the West Philippine Sea is non-negotiable. According to Robredo, having an "inclusive and independent" foreign policy that favors no specific countries would be beneficial for the Philippines. The vice-president said, her presidency would move to further strengthen relations with the United States to help protect the West Philippine Sea, and wield stronger diplomatic relations in Southeast Asia, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries where there are large concentrations of Filipino migrant workers.<sup>xi</sup> Robredo supported the Philippine government's stance supporting the international community in condemning the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>xii</sup> The vice-president said she does not agree with remaining neutral in the Russia-Ukraine crisis because international conflicts must be resolved according to the rule of law and people must take a stand.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Human Rights:** Robredo is a human rights lawyer and is a staunch critic of President Duterte's war on drugs campaign, and intends to abolish Oplan Tokhang, the notorious police-led anti-illegal drug raids, if elected president. Robredo said she plans to pursue a comprehensive war on drugs, but without the brutal killings. Her anti-illegal drug campaign will focus on prevention and rehabilitation. The vice-president has also vowed to shun a militaristic approach to addressing the decades-long insurgency in the country and instead focus on rural development to address communist insurgency in the countryside.<sup>xiv</sup> She has likewise assured that her government will ensure the protection of indigenous peoples and stressed the importance of preserving their cultural heritage.<sup>xv</sup>

**Pandemic Response:** Robredo vows to fill the gaps in the country's COVID-19 response in her first 100 days in office if she becomes the president. In one of her public appearances, Robredo said the COVID-19 response requires at least PHP 500 billion for the payment of all government debts in hospitals and the establishment of a "modern network" for the distribution of cash aid.<sup>xvi</sup> Through the Office of the Vice-President, Robredo has been active in easing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in various communities, having launched information campaigns on mitigating the spread of the coronavirus, distribution of PPEs, provision of shuttle buses to stranded medical workers, providing dormitories to health workers, teleconsultation services, and logistics assistance to transport vaccines.

## Government Policy Trajectories

### Marcos Policy Trajectory

A Marcos presidency is likely to see a continuity of President Duterte's key economic programs. In several of his public appearances, Marcos said the continuation of the president's Build, Build, Build (BBB) program will be part of his post-pandemic jobs creation program. Infrastructure projects under the BBB program were funded by both government debt and private capital.

Priority sectors likely to be prominent under a Marcos presidency include the agriculture and energy sectors. In an online forum in December 2021, Marcos said the agriculture sector must be prioritized as it involves the food security of the country. According to Marcos the government needs to consolidate its assets, utilize its agriculture experts, assess the situation on the ground, evaluate the agriculture's effects on the actual budgetary allocation, among others. The former senator was also against importation of agriculture products as this adversely affects local farmers and said he was open to suspending the Rice Tariffication Law.<sup>xvii</sup>

A Marcos presidency is also likely to be a boon for certain agriculture segments of the Philippines, particularly the tobacco industry. During his term as senator, Marcos has lobbied against the increase in sin taxes on tobacco. According to Marcos, increasing tobacco tax will result in unabated smuggling and cited the experience of Canada where high tobacco taxes have led to unabated smuggling and other crimes.<sup>xviii</sup> Marcos likewise argued that imposing higher taxes on tobacco will destroy the source of revenue of tobacco-growing provinces, one of which is the Ilocos region, which is the Marcos family's bailiwick.<sup>xix</sup>

Energy is likewise a prominent feature in Marcos' platforms. In one of his appearances, Marcos said the Philippines should have at least one nuclear power plant and cited a 2019 Social Weather Stations Survey, saying that 79 percent of Filipinos agree with the rehabilitation of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant while 65% wanted to construct new power plants. A Marcos adviser said Marcos will also look into reviving the Oil Price Stabilization Fund (OPSF), which is a form of subsidy during the administration of the late President Ferdinand Marcos to stabilize oil prices.<sup>xx</sup>

During his term as senator, Marcos pushed for the development of hydrogen as an alternative power source. In 2013, the then senator filed Senate Bill No. 408 known as "The Hydrogen Research, Promotion and Development Act of 2013," that will establish the Philippine Hydrogen Research and Development Center by the Department of Science and Technology to spearhead the development of hydrogen. The center will spearhead research, development, and utilization of hydrogen in the country.<sup>xxi</sup> The legislative proposal, however, was not passed. In August 2021, the Philippine National Oil Co. (PNOC) said it is in the initial stage of exploring the production of fuel from deuterium. This comes as the government looks to augment the country's power mix amid the prevailing rise in fuel prices in global markets.<sup>xxii</sup>

Foreign relations between the Philippines and China are expected to remain amicable under a Marcos presidency. Based on his recent statements on the Philippines' relations with China, Marcos is likely to have a pragmatic approach over the West Philippine Sea. In various interviews, Marcos said seeking to enforce the 2016 international arbitration court ruling that dismissed China's historical claims in disputed territory is no longer be feasible because China has rejected the verdict. Marcos believes that a bilateral agreement with Beijing is the only practical option for the Philippines. The former senator added that if elected president, he would dismiss any potential offer of help from the United States in negotiating with China.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Robredo Policy Trajectory

A Robredo presidency will likely see several changes in the policies implemented under the administration of President Duterte. While Robredo promised to continue Duterte's flagship BBB program in her various public appearances, she emphasized that the program will be tweaked so that infrastructure projects will have direct benefits on the marginalized sector, particularly farmers and fisherfolks. The vice-president said she will push for infrastructure such as farm-to-market roads, cold storage facilities, solar dryers, and mass transport systems to develop rural areas of the country. In terms of funding, Robredo said infrastructure under her administration will be funded through public-private partnerships and veer away from official development assistance (ODA) so as not to pile up the country's debt load.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Robredo likewise vowed to continue the campaign against illegal drugs but will move away from the current administration's approach that has been heavy on law enforcement. Under Robredo's government, the anti-illegal drug use campaign will focus on prevention and rehabilitation.<sup>xxv</sup>

In public statements made during her campaign, Robredo emphasized that her platform is centered on good governance, particularly focusing on addressing corruption in the government through accountability, transparency, and people empowerment.<sup>xxvi</sup> Robredo, in one of her campaign sorties, particularly cited corruption issues with the Department of Health's handling of the Covid-19 vaccination program and the need to stem anomalies involving the agency.<sup>xxvii</sup> The vice-president said public officials under her government will be subjected to regular lifestyle checks on top of their periodic reporting of their assets and liabilities to ensure they are models of integrity.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Robredo has also been candid about her willingness to allow investigators from the International Criminal Court to probe President Rodrigo Duterte's brutal campaign against drugs should she become his successor in Malacañang. Not only will she let ICC investigators come to the Philippines to conduct their probe on the "drug war," where crimes against humanity are alleged to have occurred, Robredo said she will also push for the country to rejoin the international tribunal.<sup>xxix</sup>

On foreign policy, a Robredo presidency is likely to see the Philippines cool its ties with China. In her public pronouncements, the vice-president vowed to reassert the Philippines' rights over the West Philippine Sea and espoused multilateral talks in settling the territorial dispute with China. Robredo declared that she will only enter any deal with the government of China regarding the territorial disputes if China recognizes the Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 ruling favoring the Philippines.



## Potential Risks in a Marcos Presidency

The Marcos family's checkered past has been the primary subject of concern among critics of Bongbong Marcos. It is estimated that the Marcos family's ill-gotten wealth stands at around USD 10 billion, which was amassed during the 20-year rule of its patriarch.

The Philippine government, through the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) established in 1986 by former president Corazon Aquino, has recovered PHP 35 billion from the Marcoses' Swiss bank accounts, as well as parcels of property in New York and Hawaii in the US, and PHP 1 billion worth of jewelry.<sup>xxx</sup>

Critics of Marcos believe a return of his family in the presidential palace will not only backpedal the government's efforts to retrieve their ill-gotten wealth but also subject the country to the same brand governance of the former dictator that was marred by corruption and human rights violations. There is also the concern that Marcos' ascendancy to the topmost post of the country will give him the executive power to undermine institutions that were created in response to his father's abuse of power.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Marcos Jr.'s competence and integrity have likewise been questioned. Among issues raised against him by critics include his alleged misrepresentation of his tertiary education records, his being an absentee leader when he was governor in Ilocos, the family's refusal to pay PHP 203 billion estate tax, and non-filing of income tax returns between 1983 and 1985.<sup>xxxii</sup> Corruption allegations have likewise been hurled against Marcos's sister Senator Imee Marcos over the alleged misuse of tobacco excise tax funds in 2017.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

A poll conducted by Bloomberg in March showed that Philippine investors are lukewarm to the prospect of a Marcos presidency. A survey of 28 investors and analysts placed Marcos second to the last among the five leading presidential candidates. Experts further noted the investors regard Marcos as less market-friendly compared to other presidential candidates when it comes to experience at the national level and in articulating a strategy for the country to recover from the pandemic.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

## Potential Risks in a Robredo Presidency

Critics describe Robredo as a mere puppet of the Liberal Party, which is the same political party of former president Noynoy Aquino, whose administration has been criticized for its ineptitude and incompetence.<sup>xxxv</sup> Such impression of the Aquino administration has consequently resulted to the Liberal Party's diminished presence in the national government with the defeat of its presidential candidate Mar Roxas in 2010. During the 2019 mid-term elections, none of the Liberal Party's eight senatorial candidates won.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The vice-president's rise to politics has likewise been compared to that of former president Corazon Aquino and her son Noynoy. The older Aquino rose to power after the death of her husband Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., while her son Noynoy catapulted to the presidency after her mother's passing. Robredo, meanwhile, came to the political limelight after the death of her husband Jesse in 2012, who was then interior and local government secretary during Noynoy Aquino's presidency. Critics of Robredo say that like the two Aquinos, her ascendance to politics was simply out of sympathy votes and not because of her competence.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

As Vice-President, Robredo has been called out by critics for not working alongside the President and was instead relentless in her criticism against the latter's programs despite of being part of the government. There is the view that Robredo's presidential bid is not driven by the goal to lead the country but to restore the Liberal Party's lost power in the national government. Robredo's early declaration that her decision to run for president was to prevent a Marcos from returning to power<sup>xxxviii</sup> was also not well-received by some sectors as this demonstrated that her platform for seeking the presidency is based on personalities, and not on issues.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Robredo's leadership has also been questioned after her failed attempt to unify the opposition in the 2022 elections. The vice-president reportedly held meetings with other presidential aspirants Senators Ping Lacson, Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, and Senator Manny Pacquiao prior to announcing her candidacy. Talks with all three personalities, however, fell through.

According to Lacson, he proposed to Robredo to adopt Senate President Vicente Sotto III as her vice-presidential bet and when the election is already near, the presidential aspirant who has the lowest possible chance of winning must give way and support the stronger candidate. Robredo, however, rejected the idea because if she files for candidacy and eventually back out many votes will be strayed. Moreno, on the other hand, was displeased when Robredo said she decided to run for president because of the Manila mayor's position on Bongbong Marcos. Moreno said Marcos should be given the chance to prove himself despite his family's record of misdeeds that have been confirmed by the courts. Robredo commented that acquiescing with the Marcoses is a "non-negotiable" matter to her, to which Moreno responded that one's decision to run cannot simply be about the Marcos family.<sup>xl</sup> Moreno then called Robredo a "fake leader with a fake color," referring how the latter dropped yellow, associated with the Liberal Party, and is now using pink.<sup>xli</sup>

On Apr. 16, 2021, Lacson, Moreno, and Norberto Gonzalez held a joint press conference to announce that none of them will withdraw their candidacies for the May 2022 polls. The presidential candidates were accompanied by vice-presidential candidates Willie Ong and Tito Sotto, who also backed their message of unity. Both Lacson and Moreno accused Robredo's team of calling them to withdraw their candidacy for president. Moreno also urged Robredo to withdraw from the presidential race.<sup>xlii</sup> Robredo's party denied that they asked any of the vice-president's rivals to drop their presidential bids to give way to her candidacy.<sup>xliii</sup>

## Personality Prevails

Presidential surveys, particularly those conducted by Pulse Asia and SWS, have track record of good forecasting performance of election results. SWS first began its presidential survey in 1992 and has correctly predicted the victory of former president Fidel Ramos and all succeeding presidents, including that of incumbent President Duterte. Pulse Asia, meanwhile, started its presidential surveys in 1998 and was right in its projection of former president Joseph Estrada's winning in that year's elections and like SWS has correctly predicted all winners in the race for the presidency.<sup>xliv</sup>

Robredo has less than a month to catch up with Marcos' figures in presidential surveys and appears to have improved her numbers in the latest popularity polls. Other presidential candidates have already expressed their intention to continue with their candidacy despite lagging behind significantly in popularity polls. Whether the race between Marcos and Robredo will be tight in the actual counting of ballots remains to be seen.

Time and again this year's elections is no different from the previous electoral exercises, as winners are primarily elected for their personality rather than substance of their platforms. As one political observer puts, Filipino voters go to the polls to choose who will govern them, but not necessarily how they will be governed.<sup>xlv</sup> And until a meaningful change takes place in the Philippines' political party landscape, victors in elections will be limited to the personalities and parties elected in office and not the electorate that supported them.

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