

POLÍTIKA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY

1ST QUARTER



Public Perception on Government Performance, Candidates & Issues, and Third-Party Studies

Philippines' scores and ranks in the Corruption Perception Index and Rule of Law Index have deteriorated over the past five years



The Need for a Responsive and Strategic Foreign Policy Outlook

A responsive and strategic foreign policy that situates Philippine national interest within the interconnectedness of states and the changing international order is imperative



Legislative Accomplishments and Updates

The President is finishing his term in the coming months, and he has clearly defined the most essential legislative measures which will help in the reopening of the economy

CONTENTS



Public Perception on Government Performance, Candidates & Issues, and Third-Party Studies

p.4



The Need for a Responsive and Strategic Foreign Policy Outlook

p.12



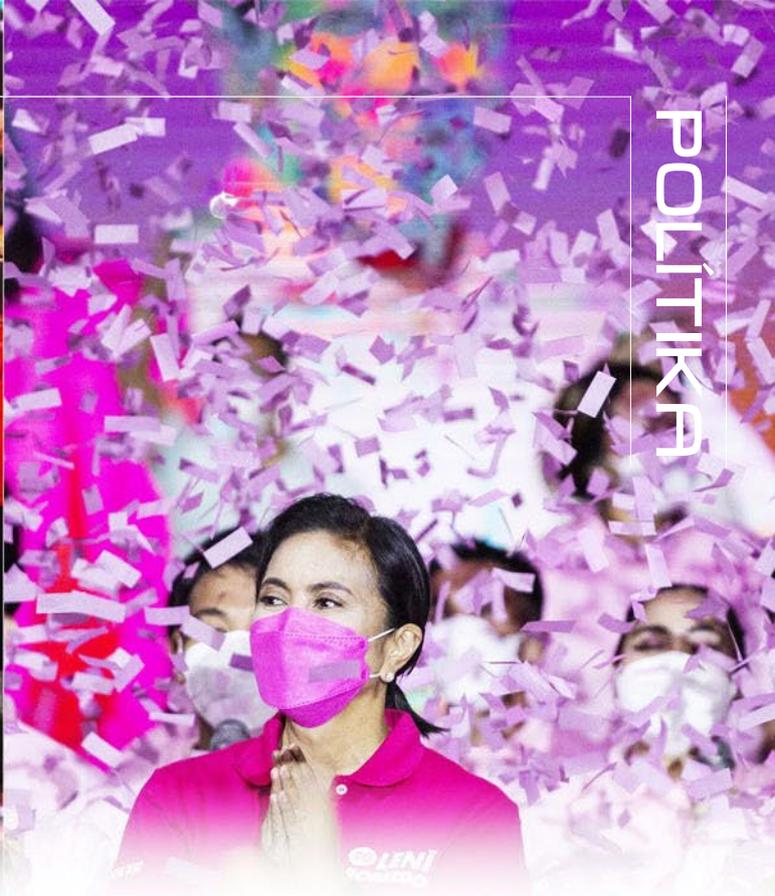
Legislative Accomplishments and Updates

p.17

ON THE COVER & CONTENTS

Credits to the following contributors:
Prof. Victor Andres “Dindo” Manhit,
and Jaime Jimenez, Ph.D.

Picture credits to the following, cover page, contents page, page 3 page 20 and page 23: cnnphilippines.com/news/2022/2/4/Bongbong-Marcos-debates-forums; bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-12/top-economists-in-philippines-back-robredo-for-president; manilatimes.net/2021/10/12/news/isko-moreno-wont-back-down-from-presidential-race/1818127; en.wikipedia.org; wazzupilpinas.com/2021/10/the-healing-president-has-bled-his-true.html?m=1; philstar.com/headlines/2022/02/08/2159411/robredos-campaign-kicks-hometown-naga-promise-new-politics; mb.com.ph/2022/02/15/bongbong-repeatedly-rallies-for-unity-in-qq-campaign-speech; pcoo.gov.ph/news_releases/president-duterte-signs-amendments-to-public-service-act/.jpg and news.abs-cbn.com/news/05/03/21/ph-patrols-in-west-philippine-sea-to-continue-lorenzana



OVERVIEW

As alert level restrictions in the country have been downgraded by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases, business activities nationwide have become fully operational. Meanwhile, electoral campaigns at all levels continue to intensify and are expected to peak in the next four weeks.

Against this environment, our POLITIKA for the First Quarter of 2022 serves as a welcome issue for the perceived prospects, priorities, and issues for the May 9 elections. Inasmuch as national and local candidates persevere to win the hearts and minds of the electorate, public opinion provides us what people “say and want” for the next set of the country’s leaders.

The first section discusses the public’s perception regarding the performance and trust ratings of top national officials. Using the surveys conducted by PULSE Asia Inc., it also reveals the issues and traits that national candidates should address and possess. Further, this section provides an update on the platforms and agenda of the top three presidential aspirants. Beyond the national discussions on governance and political issues, the results of the latest Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Justice Project reports are also presented. The section concludes by underlining the prospects and priorities beyond the May 9, 2022 elections.

In the second section, Prof. Dindo Manhit presents an abridged version of his special study entitled “A Responsive and Strategic Foreign Policy Outlook in an Interconnected and Multipolar World.” He embarks on the argument that the prioritization of our national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and development interests depends on the crafting of a responsive and strategic foreign policy that is cognizant of emerging regional and global security challenges.

The third and last section presents the legislative accomplishments of the 18th Congress and updates on legislative priorities under the Third Regular Session. Congress is currently under an Adjournment of Session, from February 5 to May 22, and the Resumption of Session is set on May 23 to June 3, after which the Adjournment of Session is scheduled from June 4 to July 24, 2022.

I. PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE, CANDIDATES & ISSUES, AND THIRD-PARTY STUDIES

Performance and Trust Ratings of Top National Officials

In the survey conducted by PULSE Asia Inc. in February 2022, the performance of President Rodrigo R. Duterte and Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III garnered majority approval ratings, with 73% and 63%, respectively. Vice President Maria Leonor G. Robredo registered a rating of 34%.

As to their disapproval ratings, 34 percent disapproved of Vice President Robredo’s performance while President Duterte and Senate President Sotto both got 10 percent disapproval ratings. (Refer to Table 1)

President Duterte’s performance ratings since June 2021 showed a significant rebound from a low of 64% in September 2021 (coming from a high of 84% in June) to 72%t in December and to 73% in February 2022. His disapproval ratings, on the other hand, registered a marginal increase from six percent in June 2021 to 10% in February 2022, which came from a high of 13% in September 2021 when his performance ratings experienced a nosedive.

Between January and February 2022, Duterte’s performance ratings marginally improved by three percent, while no change was registered in the disapproval ratings.

Vice President Robredo’s performance ratings marginally went down by three percent while her disapproval ratings marginally increased by five percent. As for Senate President Sotto, his performance ratings decreased by four percent while his disapproval ratings slightly increased by one percent. (Refer to Table 2)

In terms of record highs and lows in approval ratings, the same PULSE Asia survey revealed that President Duterte got 91% in September and November 2020 while the lowest was 64%in September 2021. Vice President Robredo’s highest rating was 64%in 2016 and the lowest was 34% in February 2022. Senate President Sotto’s highest rating was 84 percent in September 2020 while the lowest was 63% at the time this survey was conducted. (Refer to Table 3)

Currently, the trust ratings of President Duterte stand at 69 percent (Big Trust), with 22%t Undecided, and nine percent with Small/No Trust. The trust rating for Vice President Robredo is at 35% (Big Trust) with 29% Undecided and 36% with Small/No Trust. As for Senate President Sotto, he has a majority trust rating of 64%, with 27% Undecided and with nine percent Small/No Trust. (Refer to Table 4)

Table 1
Awareness & Performance Ratings of Top National Officials: **PHILIPPINES**
In Row Percent
(February 18 – 23, 2022)



Top National Officials	Aware	Base: Aware			
		Approval	Undecided	Disapproval	DK/RA*
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	100	73	17	10	0
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	100	34	32	34	0.01
VICENTE C. SOTTO III	100	63	28	10	0

*DK/RA (Don't Know/Refused) = Those who say they simply have no basis for assessing the entity, whether of trust, indecision or distrust.
Notes: (1) % Approve = % Truly Approve plus % Somewhat Approve; % Disapprove = % Somewhat Disapprove plus % Truly Disapprove
(2) Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding off.

Table 2
Comparative Performance Ratings of Top National Officials: **PHILIPPINES**
In Percent
(June 2021 to February 2022)



Top National Officials	Big Trust					Change*	Undecided					Change*	Small/No Trust					Change*
	Jun	Sep	Dec	Jan	Feb	Feb22 – Jan22	Jun	Sep	Dec	Jan	Feb	Feb22 – Jan22	Jun	Sep	Dec	Jan	Feb	Feb22 – Jan22
	21 (A)	21 (B)	21 (C)	22 (D)	22 (E)	(E-D)	21 (F)	21 (G)	21 (H)	22 (I)	22 (J)	(J-I)	21 (K)	21 (L)	21 (M)	22 (N)	22 (O)	(O-N)
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	81	63	69	69	69	0	13	25	19	21	22	+ 1	6	12	12	10	9	- 1
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	37	45	41	34	35	+ 1	34	34	29	34	29	- 5	29	22	31	32	36	+ 4
VICENTE C. SOTTO III (Senate President)	64	68	68	66	64	- 2	27	25	23	25	27	+ 2	8	7	9	10	9	- 1

*Change = Figures of February 2022 minus Figures of January 2022

Table 3
Comparative Undecided Trust Ratings of Top National Officials: **PHILIPPINES**
In Percent
(June 2021 to February 2022)



Top National Officials	Big Trust																								Change*		
	Jul 16 (A)	Sep 16 (B)	Dec 16 (C)	Mar 17 (D)	Jun 17 (E)	Sep 17 (F)	Dec 17 (G)	Mar 18 (H)	Jun 18 (I)	Sep 18 (J)	Dec 18 (K)	Jan 19 (L)	Feb 19 (M)	Mar 19 (N)	Apr 19 (O)	Jun 19 (P)	Sep 19 (Q)	Dec 19 (R)	Sep 20 (S)	Nov 20 (T)	Feb 21 (U)	Jun 21 (V)	Sep 21 (W)	Dec 21 (X)	Jan 22 (Y)	Feb 22 (Z)	Feb22-Jan22 (Z-Y)
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	91	86	83	76	81	80	82	78	87	72	76	76	78	85	70	85	74	83	91	90	88	81	63	69	69	69	0
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	62	65	58	56	60	55	58	53	56	56	56	44	45	47	41	52	46	53	50	46	48	37	45	41	34	35	+ 1
VICENTE C. SOTTO III (Senate President)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	66	66	58	55	61	50	73	66	78	79	77	70	64	68	68	66	64	- 2

*Change = Figures of February 2022 minus Figures of January 2022

Table 4
Awareness And Trust Ratings of Top National Officials: **PHILIPPINES**
In Percent
(June 2021 to February 2022)



Top National Officials	Aware	Base: Aware			
		Big Trust	Undecided	Small/ No Trust	DK/RA*
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	100	69	22	90	0
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	100	35	29	36	0
VICENTE C. SOTTO III	100	64	27	9	0

*DK/RA (Don't Know/Refused) = Those who say they simply have no basis for assessing the entity, whether of trust, indecision or distrust
Notes: (1) % Big Trust = % Very Big Trust plus % Big Trust ; % Small/ No Trust = % Small Trust plus % Very Small/ None Trust
(2) Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding off or to Don't Know and Refuse responses

Public Perception on Issues & Candidates

After the election period began on January 9, 2022, the PULSE Asia Inc. survey on the same month revealed the “Most Urgent National Concerns For A Presidential Candidate.”

Asked to prioritize three national issues that their selected candidate for the presidency should act upon if elected, almost 1 out of 2 respondents or 48 percent chose “Controlling Inflation.” The second top-of-mind national issue for more or less 1 in every 3 respondents pertains to “Improving/Increasing the pay of workers” at 38%, followed by “Reducing poverty of many Filipinos” at 33% and “Fighting graft and corruption in government” at 32%. The third most important group of issues pertains to “Creating more jobs” at 29% and “Curbing the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs” at 24%.

These findings are instructive in that the public is primarily burdened by the increasing prices of commodities, while income, poverty, and corruption concerns are their second preoccupation. Meanwhile, jobs and the prevalence of illegal drugs are their third concern.

Other issues, which garnered double-digit response percentages, include “Fighting criminality” (16%), “Enforcing the law on all whether influential or ordinary people” (15%), “Promoting peace in the country” (14%), and “Disaster preparedness, including giving early warnings for typhoons, floods, landslides & other disasters/calamities” (11%). (Refer to Table 5 below)

Table 5
Most Urgent National Concerns for a Presidential Candidate to Address: **PHILIPPINES**
In Percent/Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed
(January 19 - 24, 2022)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Those with a 1st Choice for President, 97%

NATIONAL CONCERNS	OVERALL	MENTIONED		
		FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
Controlling inflation	48	15	17	15
Improving/Increasing the pay of workers	38	13	14	10
Reducing poverty of many Filipinos	33	9	12	12
Fighting graft and corruption in government		10	10	11
Creating more jobs	29	10	9	10
Curbing the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs	24	11	7	6
Fighting criminality	16	7	4	5
Enforcing the law on all whether influential or ordinary people	15	6	5	4
Promoting peace in the country	14	4	4	6
Disaster preparedness, including giving early warnings for typhoons, floods, landslides & other disasters/calamities	11	3	3	5
Speed of responding to the needs of those affected by typhoons and other disasters/calamities	9	3	4	3
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	9	2	3	4
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	7	2	2	3
Curbing the spread of illegal gambling like jueteng	6	2	2	2
Preparing to successfully face any kind of terrorism	5	1	1	3
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	4	1	1	1
UNAIDED				
Others	1	1	0.2	0.1

Q9. Sa mga sumusunod na isyung pambansa, pakisabi kung anong tatlong isyu ang dapat aksyunan kaagad ng inyong napiling kandidato kapag siya ay naupo bilang presidente. Alin dito ang pinakauna, ikalawa at ikatlo?

The findings of the February 2022 survey on the most urgent national concerns that a presidential candidate should address is similar to the December 2021 survey. Accordingly, the “Issues that Candidates for National Position Should Focus On” consisted of “Controlling inflation” (45%), “Providing jobs” (44%), “Fighting graft and corruption in government” (36%), “Increasing the wages of workers” (34%), and “Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos” (32%).

In a succeeding survey in February 2022, PULSE Asia Inc. asked the public “For those running for president in 2022, which of the following is the most important reason why you are voting for a particular candidate? “

In response, almost 1 out of 4 or 23 % gave utmost importance to the qualification of having or being “Untarnished character/reputation, not corrupt.” This is followed by a candidate who “Has a clear program or platform of action” at 20%. In a distant third is that candidate who “Has extensive experience in governance” at 11 percent and who is “Knowledgeable in the management of government” at 10 percent. Meanwhile, only five percent cited the trait of being “Pro-poor.”

These findings show that there is a significant public interest in electing leaders with political integrity, program, experience and competency. It can also insinuate the level of maturity of the electorate.

However, uncertainties abound on whether such public perception will be translated into votes for candidates with integrity and competency or whether personalism will persist and still be the main determinant come election day. (Refer to Table 6 below)

Table 6
Most Important Consideration In Choosing a Presidential Candidate: PHILIPPINES
 In Percent/Single Answer Only
 (February 18 - 23, 2022)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Likely Voters, 100%

For those running for president in 2022, which of the following is the most important reason why you are voting for a particular candidate?

	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	C	D	E
Untarnished character/reputation, not corrupt	23	25	22	26	20	13	24	23
Has a clear program or platform of action	20	23	21	19	17	19	21	16
Has extensive experience in governance 1	11	14	10	12	12	14	12	8
Knowledgeable in the management of government	10	8	10	11	10	22	9	7
Pro-poor	5	7	5	4	7	5	6	4
Helpful	5	5	5	5	6	4	5	9
Intelligent	5	3	6	4	6	0	5	8
God-loving/Religious	4	1	6	3	4	3	4	7
Winnability	4	4	2	4	5	5	4	3
Industrious	3	5	4	4	1	8	3	3
Approachable	3	2	3	4	3	2	3	4
Not violent	1	1	1	0	3	1	1	1
Endorsement of respected person or leader	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Courageous	1	2	1	4	2	0	1	2
Nationalistic/	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	2
Not from a political dynasty	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	0
Party affiliation	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1

Q17. Sa mga kumakandidato para sa pagka-presidente sa 2022, alin sa mga sumusunod ang pinaka-importanteng dahilan sa inyong pagboto sa isang kandidato?

Table 7
 Presidential Candidate Who Best Fits Selected Criteria: **PHILIPPINES**
 In Percent
 (February 18 - 23, 2022)



PulseAsia
 RESEARCH INC.

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS	Base: Likely Voters, 100%			
	MARCOS, BONGBONG (PFP)	ROBREDO, LENI (IND)	DOMAGOSO, ISKO MORENO (AKSYON)	UNAIDED Don't Know/Refused/None
The most honest and trustworthy	53	16	14	6
The greatest concern for the poor	47	15	16	3
The least corrupt	41	15	13	13
SELECTED ISSUES				
Has the clearest plan to address the country's problems	60	14	11	5
Will best defend the country against China	56	12	9	7

Sa inyong palagay, sino sa mga sumusunod na kandidato para sa pagka-presidente ang nagtataglay ng bawat katangiang nabanggit?
 Q11. Sinong kandidato sa pagka-presidente ang pinaka may malasakit sa mahihirap?
 Q12. Sinong kandidato sa pagka-presidente ang pinakatapat at mapagkakatiwalaan?
 Q13. Sinong kandidato sa pagka-presidente ang pinaka hindi tiwali o kurakot? Sa inyong palagay, sino sa mga sumusunod na kandidato para sa pagka-presidente ang pinakamakakatugon sa bawat isyung nabanggit.
 Q14. Sinong kandidato sa pagka-presidente ang may pinakamalinaw na plano para tugunan ang mga problema ng bansa?
 Q15. Sinong kandidato sa pagka-presidente ang pinakamahusay na magtatanggol sa bansa laban sa China?

Note: Totals may not add up due to rounding off.

On a question embargoed to the Stratbase ADR Institute, the same PULSE Asia survey asked the respondents about the presidential candidate that best fits the selected criteria pertaining to characteristics and issues.

Remarkably, Bongbong Marcos topped the survey on “selected characteristics” with 53% saying that he is “The most honest and trustworthy,” while 47 and 41% respectively say that he has “The greatest concern for the poor” and “The least corrupt.”

On “selected issues,” majority opined that he “Has the clearest plan to address the country’s problems” (60%) and that he “Will best defend the country against China” (56%). (Refer to Table 7)

Third-Party Studies

Transparency International – Corruption Perceptions Index 2021

The Corruption Perceptions Index is a study conducted by Transparency International which focuses on the levels of perception of corruption among experts and businesspeople. Accordingly, the index uses 13 data sources to capture two elements in corruption—corrupt behavior and prevention mechanisms. Corrupt behavior include bribery, diversion of public funds, use of public office for private gain, nepotism in the civil service, and state capture. Meanwhile, prevention mechanisms include the government’s ability to enforce

Table 8
Corruption Perceptions Index: **PHILIPPINES**
(2016-2021)

Year	Rank	Score
2016	101	35
2017	111	34
2018	99	36
2019	113	34
2020	115	34
2021	117	33

Source: Transparency International CPI Data Set

Table 9
Rule of Law Index: **PHILIPPINES**
(2016-2021)

Year	Score	Rank
2016	0.51	77
2018	0.47	88
2019	0.47	90
2020	0.47	90
2021	0.46	102

Source: WJP Data Set, 2016-2021

integrity mechanisms, the effective prosecution of corrupt officials, red tape and excessive bureaucratic burden, the existence of adequate laws on financial disclosure, conflict of interest prevention and access to information.

The index ranks 180 countries and territories, with 0 as the score for highly corrupt and 100 for very clean.

From the rank of 99 in 2018 with a score of 36, the Philippines' Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has gone down by 18 places in 2021, with a rank of 117 out of 180 countries and a score of 33 out of 100 and a point lower than the previous year. The improvement by 12 places observed from 2017 to 2018, from rank 111 to 99, suddenly became immaterial.

A low score in the CPI indicates a higher incidence of corruption and the Philippines has moved even closer to being described as "highly corrupt," as the tabular presentation below demonstrate the continuous downward trend of Philippine CPI score and rank for the past three years (Refer to Table 8 above)

The World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index® 2021

The World Justice Project (WJP) conducts the Rule of Law Index report to quantitatively measure the rule of law in practice. The 2021 index presents a "portrait of the rule of law in 139 countries and jurisdictions by providing scores and rankings based on eight factors: Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, and Criminal Justice" (WJP, 2021).

The Philippine Rule of Law index has shown a continuous decline since 2016. From a score of 0.51 (rank 77th), the country's performance deteriorated in 2018, showing a score of 0.47 and a rank of 88th place. This score was unchanged in 2019 and 2020 but its rank went down to the 90th place as several countries showed improvements. And in 2021, the country's rank further went down by 12 places with a lower score of 0.46. The succeeding tabular presentation shows the consistent downward trend of Philippine government's in observing the rule of law (Refer to Table 9)

Specifically, Table 10 below shows the country’s score according to the eight indicators of the rule of law provided by the WJP.

Table 9
Overall Score, Rule of Law Index: **PHILIPPINES**
(2021)

Indicator	Overall Score	Global Rank
Constraints on Government Powers	0.48	85
Absence of Corruption	0.44	77
Open Government	0.50	71
Fundamental Rights	0.39	123
Order and Security	0.63	110
Regulatory Enforcement	0.48	82
Civil Justice	0.45	101
Criminal Justice	0.31	120

Source: WJP Data Set, 2016-2021

Candidates’ Platforms and Agenda

A rundown on the policy pronouncements of the top three presidential aspirants shows that their perceived programs cut across socio-political-economic concerns, which generally reflect the urgent national concerns of the Filipino population, namely, inflation, pay of workers, job creation, poverty, and graft and corruption in government. (Refer to Table 11 below)

Table 11
Agenda of the Top Three Presidential Aspirants: **PHILIPPINES**

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr.	Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo	Francisco “Isko Moreno” Domagoso
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority program on job generation in three areas: MSMEs, agriculture, and tourism. • Economic recovery to be ensured by increasing public investments, Public-Private Partnerships, and uniting all sectors. • Fix the digital infrastructure and internet connectivity. • Strengthening of agriculture sector; the pandemic showed that food supply issues are due to over-reliance on imports. • Increased support for public school system by addressing the needs of teachers, and improving education facilities and supplies. • To ensure energy supply, more power plants will be created, and geothermal and hydroelectric plants will be expanded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHP 100-billion stimulus package will be provided for MSMEs. • Public-Private Partnerships, community kitchens, and strengthened agricultural production programs to address hunger. • People’s trust in government must be revived in order to encourage more businesses and jobs. • Expanded Public Employment Program and Unemployment Insurance Program for those who lost their jobs. • Institutionalization of feeding programs in public schools. • Increase of the national education budget to a level not lower than 6% of GDP. • The government to allocate public funds for active transport. • Climate resilience should be a key issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority projects and policies for housing, education, labor and employment, health, and tourism, among others. • Health facilities and regional hospitals will be upgraded. • The Build, Build, Build program will be continued, focusing on houses, schools, hospitals, post-harvest facilities, and more sources of energy. • Expand the Public-Private Partnerships. • Public data to be made more accessible and government processes will be simplified. • Taxes on oil and electricity should be lowered to attract more foreign investors. • Farmers will be provided with capital and credit assistance.

Sources: SMNI Presidential Debate (February 2022), Rated Korina Interviews (February 2022), The KBP Presidential Forum (February 2022), CNN Presidential Debate (February 2022), COMELEC PiliPinas Debates (March 2022), PTV’s The Chatroom (March 2022)

Additionally, the camp of frontrunner Marcos, Jr. embarks upon the slogan “Jobs! Jobs! Jobs!” as the core of its Economic Program. As part of a perceived Infrastructure Program, the aspirant promises to expand the BBB program to boost the Golden Age of Infrastructure. Further, his agenda covers general programs for education (e.g., continuous training and education), healthcare (e.g., construction of Rural Health Units in communities), agriculture and food security (e.g., suspend the Rice Tariffication Law and minimize import), socioeconomic development (e.g., holistic approach in the creation of Human Settlement Communities), and industrialization and energy (e.g., transition into an Agri-Industrial economy and renewed exploration and implementation of nuclear energy program).

To provide more context, Table 12 below provides a general outline of the main policy positions of the top three presidential candidates vis-à-vis key national issues as of February 8, 2022, i.e., economic, foreign affairs and military, human rights and the war on drugs, elections, transparency and accountability, social, and political reform issues. These positions were taken or lifted from television, online, and radio interviews as well as the candidates’ official websites.

Table 12
Stand on Key National Issues of the Top Three Presidential Candidates: **PHILIPPINES**

Issue	Bongbong Marcos	Leni Robredo	Isko Moreno
Amending the Constitution to allow 100% ownership by foreigners of certain businesses	-	Yes, but only to open debates and discussions	Yes
Strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Continuing the Build, Build, Build (BBB) Program	Yes	Yes	Yes
Allowing POGO operations	-	No	Yes
Granting a franchise to online sabong	-	No	Yes
Signing into law the Boracay Island Development Authority (BIDA) Bill	-	No	No
Mandatory vaccination against COVID-19	No	No	No
Lifting the ban on granting mining permits	Yes	No	Yes
Lifting the ban on open-pit mining	No, until a new type of technology that allows the safe operation of open-pit mining is available	No	Yes
Continuing the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the Philippines and the US	-	Yes	Yes
Conducting joint explorations between the Philippines and China in the West Philippine Sea (WPS)	-	Yes, but only if China recognizes the Hague ruling	Yes
Continuing the peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF	-	Yes	Yes
There were extrajudicial killings (EJK) in the anti-drug war campaign	-	Yes	Yes
Bringing back the Philippines’ membership to the International Criminal Court (ICC)	-	Yes	Yes
The ICC should prosecute President Rodrigo Duterte	-	Abstain; not in a position to answer	No
Allowing the ICC to visit the Philippines to start preliminary investigations on human rights crimes with regard to the war on drugs	No	Yes	Yes
Banning substitution by withdrawal among candidates	-	Yes	Yes
Mandatory drug testing for all candidates	-	Yes	Yes
Banning candidates facing charges from running in elections	-	Yes, but depends on the evidence	Yes
Publicizing public officials’ SALN	No	Yes	Yes
Publicizing the President’s medical records	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abolishing the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG)	Undecided	No	No
Same-sex marriage	-	No. But yes for same-sex union	No
Divorce	Undecided	No	Yes
Death penalty	Undecided	No	No
Legalizing the use of marijuana for medical purposes	Undecided	Yes	Yes
Lowering the age of criminal liability	-	No	No
Enacting a law to legalize rape-related abortion	Yes, but only in severe cases	No. But open to discussion	No
Legalizing jueteng	-	No	Yes
Making political dynasties illegal	No	Yes	Yes
Two-party or multi-party system	-	Two-party	Two-party
Parliamentary or presidential	-	Presidential	Presidential
In favor of constitutional amendment regarding requirements for the presidency	No	No	No

Prospects and Priorities for the May 9, 2022 Elections

As the national economy continues to struggle and grapple with the immediate and lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first program of action that the next administration should look into is the crafting of an inclusive and responsive recovery plan. The need for such plan is reflective of the pressing concerns of the public through and beyond the health and economic crisis.

The 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index and World Justice Project reports demonstrate the persistence of corruption and the significant underperformance of the Philippine government in upholding the rule of law. These findings constitute one of the urgent governance concerns that the next administration should look into.

The second step would be to strengthen the country's institutional oversight mechanisms such as the Commission on Audit, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee.

Alongside institutional and administrative reforms for anti-corruption improvements, civil society and private sector initiatives in combatting corruption and promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law should be harnessed.

In light of the election season, the next government should, in between and during electoral exercises, delve into a multisectoral voter education campaign and strengthen existing efforts toward this end. The COMELEC, as the country's electoral institution, should spearhead such undertaking in collaboration with actors from civil society and the private sector.

Fourth, the next government should actualize the potentials and harness the initiatives of the private sector in the country's economic recovery program and national development beyond the pandemic. By partnering with the private sector, government will be able to bolster recovery efforts and attract the necessary investments in the process.

Fifth, public opinion should be seriously considered by the next administration. Beyond populist intentions, the new set of national and local leaders must be keen in addressing the demands and needs of the public or the population at large.

On May 9, 2022, the personalist and pragmatist character of electoral politics in the country, the public perception of vouching for candidates with integrity, clear platform, and competency, and individual voting preferences will all be put into test.

II. THE NEED FOR A RESPONSIVE AND STRATEGIC FOREIGN POLICY OUTLOOK¹

As the international community recovers from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing interconnectedness of states and the simultaneous existence of various traditional and non-traditional challenges have engineered a more multifaceted and unpredictable geopolitical backdrop, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Global risks and challenges were further complicated by changes in the international political economy, geopolitical shifts, rising inequality, and political instabilities.

Given the prospects of a new leadership and government, a responsive and strategic Philippine foreign policy should locate and configure the country's national interest within the increasing interconnectedness of states and the changing international order. It should prioritize economic diplomacy to harness the contribution of both state and non-state actors in national development and international diplomacy. The

2022 national exercise thus provides the opportunity to re-evaluate the direction of its foreign policy, strategic alliances, and partnerships, as well as its role in global and regional affairs.

The Deterioration of the Old World and the Shift to a Multipolar Order

Economic factors such as the share of the G7 in global GDP, China's rise, the importance of whose monetary policy matters to the rest of the world, the growing contribution of Developing and Transitional Countries (DTCs) in world output, and the South-South trade² facilitated the emergence and development of a multipolar world.

On top of the economic entangling is the growing importance of Asia in global politics which ultimately challenges the influence of the major Western powers to smaller-to-middle powers' own national interests. Putting economic interconnectedness into the equation, states must align and consider multilateral and inclusive cooperation to prevent the escalation of extant conflicts to pursue their national interests.

The emergence of various traditional and non-traditional challenges also led to a more complex and unpredictable geopolitical milieu, especially in the Indo-Pacific. The region's growing strategic importance has caused major international players to realign their foreign policy to develop mutually beneficial relationships. Global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the US-China strategic competition, and climate change have also underscored multilateral cooperation's importance in managing risks and challenges collectively, as highlighted in the recent fourth meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) foreign ministers in Australia and the Summit for Democracy hosted by the United States.

Globalization and the Rules-Based International System

The existence of more initiatives on international cooperation blends well with the opportunities and challenges brought by the new age of globalization. In this context, the results of the upcoming 2022 Philippine national elections will be instrumental in shaping the direction of the country's foreign policy. The next set of Filipino leaders is expected to face the domestic issues unresolved by the current and previous administrations, including foreign indebtedness and the socioeconomic consequences of the ongoing global health crisis. Beyond these issues, the new government will also face formidable geopolitical challenges from the renewed tensions in the West Philippine Sea to the regional disruptions brought by China's expansionist efforts to reshape the rules-based international order.

As the Philippines continues its efforts to uphold national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the competition to gain access to the contested waters still has a lingering impact on the relations between China and the United States. While the latter attempts to renew its leadership in the region and promote the rule of international law, China seeks to strengthen its military power and further assert its regional dominance. Under these circumstances, the Philippines and other claimant states should re-evaluate and adopt a common position to ensure that international law and existing regional policies are followed.

Independent Foreign Policy and Philippine National Interest

The 2012 Scarborough Shoal or the Panatag Shoal stand-off represents the type of disturbances in the West Philippine Sea that have triggered a significant change in the country's foreign policy. Under the Aquino leadership, the Philippines signed the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to manage the country's external relations and effectively respond to external threats. In January 2013, the Aquino administration also brought the country's case against China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. This eventually led to the country's arbitral victory in 2016, invalidating China's "nine-dash line" and historic rights over the South China Sea. The Tribunal also confirmed China's violation of international law

seen through its illegal activities, such as the development of artificial islands in the Spratlys, which caused severe harm to the country's marine environment. Although China refused to acknowledge the ruling, the international community strongly supported the strategic decision.

Distancing himself from the direction taken by the previous administration, President Rodrigo Duterte altered the overall political and diplomatic stance of the country. On September 10, 2016, he announced his administration's pursuit of an "independent foreign policy" founded on three core principles: (1) Separation of Philippine foreign policy from the United States; (2) Improvement of relations with China; and (3) Improvement of relations with non-traditional partners such as Russia, Japan, and India.³

Dr. Renato de Castro, a Stratbase trustee and program convenor, wrote in his 2022 paper: "President Rodrigo Duterte unraveled his predecessor's strategy of balancing China's expansive claim in the South China Sea."

In de Castro's perspective, which situates Philippine defense and security interests in the middle of the U.S.-China strategic competition, the provisional limited hard balancing policy of President Duterte should metamorphose into a comprehensive and formal grand strategy. This policy is also anchored on the West Philippine Sea dilemma and the growing attention and expansion of China in the disputed waters. This resulted in forging a precarious regional arrangement affecting the dynamics between the littoral states and major players in the region.

In a nutshell, de Castro foresees the following recommendations to represent an imperative challenge for the 17th Philippine president and guide the country's security policy in the next six years.

1. Immediate formulation by the National Security Council (NSC) of a new NSS based on the July 12 2016 Arbitral Ruling on the South China Sea Dispute;
2. Incorporation of Health Security in the National Security Strategy, the National Defense and Military Strategies, and in the National Economic Development and Authority's (NEDA) Five-Year Development Plan;
3. Building of the AFP's territorial defense capabilities with a specific focus on developing its ability to wage asymmetrical warfare in the country's maritime domain;
4. Funding of Horizon 2 of the AFP modernization program with a clear vision that procurement and prioritization of equipment should follow the country's NSS based on the July 12, 2016 Arbitral Award;
5. Increase in Philippine defense spending while effecting reforms to reduce the proportion of the budget allocated to personnel expenditures;
6. A conscious and concerted effort to link the NSS to the NDS and the AFP modernization program;
7. Initiation of the reform process for the transfer of Internal Security functions from the AFP to the Philippine National Police (PNP);
8. Support for current legislations aimed at providing the AFP's chairman of the joint-chief-of-staff and its members with a fixed three-year term;
9. A strengthening of Philippine-U.S. alliance by implementing the 2014 EDCA and forming with the U.S. a bilateral "4+4 strategic, diplomatic, economic, and public health dialogue mechanism that will advance a comprehensive security partnership between the two allies;
10. Enhancement of Philippine security partnerships with other American allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia; and
11. A leverage on existing and newly formed multilateral arrangements that are committed in defending the rules-based international system.⁴

Globalization, Open Markets, and Economic Diplomacy

Despite the criticism of the international community on the contentious issues involving China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, China continues to maximize the BRI and broaden its network of economic relations and extend its influence on small states, including the Philippines. China's preferred international order, in turn, is wittingly or unwittingly embraced by BRI-involved countries amid the more expansive and extensive opening of national markets to international trade.

To date, China has committed to providing funding to implement several infrastructure projects under the Duterte administration's Build, Build, Build (BBB) program. This administration pursued a foreign policy to harness potential economic benefits from global initiatives such as BRI. Unfortunately, none of the big-ticket projects funded by China, such as the New Centennial Water-Source Kaliwa Dam Project, the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project, and the Safe Philippines Project, have significantly advanced.

Aside from having questionable bidding processes, most of these projects have faced bureaucratic bottlenecks, including lack of financing, corruption issues, environmental degradation, and opposition from civil society organizations. They have also become controversial due to possible risks concerning national security, the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. The experience of the Philippines with BRI demonstrates the need to safeguard national interests vis-à-vis the capacity of powerful states in expanding their influence and shaping policies to their benefit. It also shows how economic partnerships can be used as a tool to challenge shared democratic norms and institutions in the region.

Economic diplomacy still plays an integral part in Philippine foreign policy as it contributes to its economic and development agenda, albeit the existence of the said challenges. In the broader regional context, the Philippines is in a strategic vantage point relative to the United States, China, and other major players due to its non-threatening stance and its ability to move through the "hierarchical" nature of regional and global affairs. It has the opportunity to further establish a key role in creating an environment for economic development and people-centered prosperity in the Indo-Pacific without undermining the participation of other states.⁵

Promoting Global Cooperation and Collective Problem Solving

Security dialogues or arrangements, e.g., The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the AUKUS alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, are also seen as vital to the peace and stability of the region. They demonstrate the significance of engaging in multilateral and inclusive cooperation in advancing a regional mechanism to navigate an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific.

On February 11, 2022, the most recent Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting took place in Australia. It was attended by Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi Yoshimasa, and United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The ministers discussed their "positive and ambitious agenda" to promote a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific. They have also expressed their commitment to cooperate on various regional issues such as terrorism, maritime security, and global supply chain challenges.

On maritime security, the foreign ministers reiterated the importance of international law, such as the UNCLOS and a rules-based international order in managing the issues. In a joint statement, the leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to a free, open, and inclusive rules-based order. They reiterated the importance of addressing coercive economic policies and practices and upholding and strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system. Moreover, the meeting discussed other key areas, including climate change, cybersecurity, infrastructure development, education, and critical and emerging technologies.⁶

Cooperative Security, Democratic Community and Rule of Law

On December 9 and 10, 2021, the Summit for Democracy reiterated the importance of international cooperation among democratic states. The summit brought together 110 government leaders, as well as civil society and private sector representatives. It reflected the democratic community's shared interests to combat corruption, address the rising tide of authoritarianism, and promote human rights. The present global competition is perceived not only in terms of military and economic aspects but also in terms of shared democratic values.

Respect for the rule of law is crucial in collectively managing foreign policy issues, particularly on maritime and territorial disputes. In an attempt to manage state relations and territorial disputes, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been negotiating with China to develop a Code of Conduct (COC) for the South China Sea. The Philippines was designated as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations. During the ASEAN-G7 Foreign and Development Ministers Meeting last December 2021, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr said that the Philippines opposed the efforts to exclude foreign powers like the United States in accessing the South China Sea. Despite the desire to collectively solve the issue, the foreign affairs secretary noted that the negotiations with China for a COC “went nowhere.”⁷

Multilateralism and Global Governance

The future of the Indo-Pacific lies in the strengthening of multilateral and inclusive cooperation among like-minded states, including the United States, Australia, Japan, India, and members of the EU. In the new age of globalization, ongoing efforts for cooperation focus on global health and pandemic, climate change, digitalization, cybersecurity, trade and investment, and terrorism. As more states introduce and realign their foreign policy, countries like the Philippines should utilize the opportunity to create additional channels for cooperation. Given the current international order, attempts to move toward a unilateral world would not benefit the region as it would only elevate risks and affect the dynamics between major players. On the other hand, fostering multilateral and inclusive cooperation would create a mechanism that will enable the region to manage power shifts and collectively address various challenges, including those that are transnational. Advancing this initiative would also be beneficial in protecting international law and promoting a rules-based international order. The Philippine government should learn and strategize through its existing alliances and partnerships to advance its strategic interests and contribute to the global effort of promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

As part of an interconnected and networked international society, the Philippines must develop a more responsive and strategic foreign policy that will effectively contribute to the ongoing efforts to collectively manage global and regional issues. Fostering multilateral and strategic partnerships is imperative if the Philippines is to recover from the adverse consequences of the current administration’s foreign policy decisions and be rightly aligned with the growing global alliance advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific.⁸

The new administration should plan and act based on the various Indo-Pacific strategies being pushed by the international community, such as the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy, Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), QUAD cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the European Union Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and ASEAN’s Indo-Pacific Outlook.

Towards A More Responsive and Strategic Philippine Foreign Policy

Given the lessons from the previous administrations, the new set of leaders can push for policies and initiatives that are consistent with the interests of the Filipino people.

In a nutshell, a more responsive and strategic foreign policy in the next six years and beyond should therefore be cognizant and considerate of the following conditions and factors: the configuration of Philippine national interest with the evolving interconnectedness and multipolarity, economic diplomacy as the primary means of showing the contribution of both state and non-state actors in national development and international diplomacy, equal consideration to various factors affecting human security, the continuing importance of alliances and strategic partnerships in navigating through the changing international order, and the public perception on how government should act on international issues and developments.

Dr. de Castro, who also serves as one of the defense and security experts of Stratbase ADR Institute, expresses that “the key challenge for the 17th Philippine president is to transform the current administration’s unplanned and makeshift policy of limited hard balancing into a well-thought, comprehensive, and formal grand strategy that will guide the Philippines in the next six years.”⁹

The next administration, in essence, should uphold national sovereignty and territorial integrity in the West Philippine Sea and implement a clear, cohesive, and consistent foreign policy. This primary duty should then be bolstered by the fostering of multilateral and inclusive cooperation through alliances and strategic partnerships and prioritizing economic cooperation and participation in regional and global initiatives.

III. LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND UPDATES

As the Philippines prepares for the national elections in May, it continues to address the need for an effective COVID-19 response despite the continual decrease in daily cases in the first month of 2022. Since the President is finishing his term in the coming months, he has clearly defined the most essential legislative measures or priority bills which will help in the reopening of the economy to galvanize economic growth and allow more investments to help the economy recover further. Since businesses, particularly MSMEs, have somehow found their footing towards the end of 2021 relative to the disastrous first year of the pandemic which was 2020, the latest lineup of priority bills aims to further foster growth and continually alleviate the financial situation of Filipinos as the political leadership transitions into a new phase by the midpoint of this year.

Both the President and business groups alike agree that legislative priorities such as the Amendments to the Public Service Act and the Amendments to the Foreign Investments Act must be signed into law in order to reign in more investments into the country, which will in turn spur economic growth as well as create more opportunities and jobs for Filipinos. In reality, the events during the past 2 years saw the immediate need for multi-sectoral collaboration, and the passage of these bills will certainly attract both foreign and local investors in the years to come.

Other priority bills like the Internet Transactions Act, the Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act, the Night Shift Differential Pay for government workers Act, and the Measures to Protect Individuals Engaged in Food, Grocery, and Pharmacy Delivery Services Act truly aim to make life easier for business owners and consumers alike, as well as provide additional modes of earning or receiving compensation and welfare to pertinent individuals.

With less than six months left before the current government ends, the President and his economic team have ensured that the laws and policies being pushed will create long-term economic progress and generate local and foreign interest in the coming years.

Legislative Priorities

The Senate and the House of Representatives have adjourned their sessions before the official start of the campaign period for the 2022 national elections. Both chambers of the Philippine Congress have approved and ratified significant policy measures that have now been given President Rodrigo Duterte's final approval, which are The Amendments to the Public Service Act, RA 11659 and the Amendments to the Foreign Investment Act, RA 11647.

The Amendments to the Public Service Act (filed as SB 2094 and HB 78) was signed into law on March 21, 2022. Among the most salient points in the said measure states that airports and seaports are henceforth included as "public utilities" in addition to the distribution of electricity, transmission of electricity and water and pipeline distribution, and wastewater pipeline distribution. In addition, telecommunications, railways, subways, tollways, and expressways are now deemed and included as critical infrastructure.

Another priority measure that was signed into law last March 2, 2022 is Republic Act (RA) No. 11647, which amends the Foreign Investments Act. The signed law will reduce stringent requirements for foreign investors,

specifically by allowing qualified non-Philippine nationals to fully own small and medium enterprises. According to the law, foreign investments will be pushed to boost enterprises that significantly expand livelihood and employment opportunities for Filipinos.”

With the expected entry of more investments into the Philippine market, more jobs will be generated that will in turn contribute to the country’s economic recovery. The law aims to attract more global investors by easing foreign equity restrictions, modernizing sectors of public service, and ultimately improving the delivery of essential services. By easing the said restrictions, the law will help facilitate critical investments to fast-track inclusive recovery and development

Furthermore, the Night Shift Differential Pay Act (filed as SB 643 and HB 5712) and was also ratified last February 2, 2022. The measure seeks to grant night shift differential to government employees serving position items from Division Chief and below, or their equivalent, including those in GOCCs, at a rate not exceeding 20 percent of the basic hourly rate of the employee for each hour of work performed between 6 PM and 6 AM the day after.

A pertinent bill that also moved was SB 2302, or Food, Grocery, and Pharmacy Delivery Services Protection Act. The Senate approved it on Third Reading last January 17, 2022. The bills aim to lay down the penalties for erring parties who maliciously avail themselves of delivery services with the intention of not compensating the said service giver. The House of Representatives (HOR) version of the bill or HB 7805 had already been approved last November 24, 2020.

House Bill 10571, or the Motorcycle-For-Hire Act, was approved by the House of Representatives on Third Reading last January 31, 2022. The proposed measure will allow the operation of motorcycles as common carriers for the transportation of passengers and goods, including parcels and mail. Under the measure, the LTO shall promulgate all the pertinent operational guidelines set forth the requirements for the issuance of a professional driver’s license, including the license examination content appropriate for the operation of a motorcycle-for-hire. The HOR version is currently pending its second reading since Feb 18, 2020.

The Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act (filed as SB 1411 and HB 8097) was ratified last January 26, 2022. Once signed into law, solo parents and their children will be given automatic PhilHealth coverage, a monthly cash subsidy of PHP 1,000 for each indigent solo parent, and inclusion in apprenticeship programs for eligible solo parents and their children under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Furthermore, SB 1764 or the Digital Payments Act, which aims to institute digital payments, particularly in all government agencies, offices, and local government units, is being pushed for approval to promote ease of doing business. This will also go a long way in ensuring the efficient delivery of services to the people. Since consumers have experienced the convenience of making digital payments—be it for buying goods, the payment of services, or their monthly bills. Now, Filipinos will be given the option of doing the same for their transactions with the government so that physically going to and lining up at city hall or other offices will no longer be necessary, especially now that the world is going through precarious times due to the pandemic. A technical working group discussed the Senate version of the bill last December 15, 2021.

Similarly, the Internet Transactions Act or SB 2489 is currently pending its Second Reading as the continual push to pass the measure has been evident with the rise of e-commerce during the duration of the pandemic. The measure will prospectively establish the Electronic Commerce Bureau, which will oversee effective regulation of e-commerce activities in the country. It will also cover business-to-business and business-to-consumer e-commerce and internet transactions, including those related to internet retail of consumer goods and services, online travel services and media providers, ride-hailing services, and digital financial services.

Priority Bills Based on the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC)

Amendments to the Foreign Investments Act – RA No. 11647

The amendment to the Foreign Investments Act of 1991 was signed into law last March 2, 2022 and is now known as Republic Act (RA) No. 11647. The signed law will reduce stringent requirements for foreign investors, specifically by allowing qualified non-Philippine nationals to fully own small and medium enterprises except if their participation is prohibited or limited to a smaller percentage in the foreign investments negative list. The law aims to push for more foreign investments which will boost enterprises that significantly expand livelihood and increase employment opportunities for Filipinos.

Generally, the amendments will prospectively make the rules less stringent for foreign businesses as the Philippines is known for being one of the most restrictive countries in terms of foreign investing. Furthermore, the bill will boost the economy as more jobs will be created along with the opening of more businesses.

One of the salient features of the bill aims to allow foreigners to own small and medium-sized enterprises with a minimum paid-up capital of less than USD 100,000 if it involves advanced technology or employs at least 15 direct employees. This rate would purportedly attract more foreign investments and encourage the transfer of technology thereby generating more jobs and develop more skills for Filipinos.

Additionally, the proposed bill provides regulations for off-shore business entities which conduct transactions locally through e-commerce as domestic market enterprises, which will make such entities subject to the Act and other relevant laws.

Another feature of the bill would allow pertinent agencies to review proposed foreign investments that may pose a threat to national security or jeopardize international investments. In addition, the said agencies may make recommendations to the President for appropriate action.

In order to appease the fears of total foreign takeovers happening, the amendment provides that the National Security Council will be able to review proposed foreign investments to proscribe any signs of possible encroachments in the control of critical infrastructure.

Lastly, the amendments also mandate the formation of the Inter-Agency Investment Promotion Coordination Committee (IIPCC), which will evaluate foreign investments in military-related industries, cyberinfrastructure, and other activities that may be a threat to the country's cybersecurity. The trade secretary, with the secretary or an undersecretary of the Department of Finance as vice chair, will be the main point persons to operationalize this function.

The bills were ratified last December 7, 2021. The amendments were signed into law last March 2, 2022 and became RA No. 11595.

Amendments to the Public Service Act (RA No. 11659)

The proposed measure aims to open different services sectors to foreign ownership by defining public utilities and separating them from public services. It seeks to modernize Commonwealth Act No. 146 or the Public Service Act to ease foreign equity restrictions and further accelerate the country's economic recovery.

According to Senator Grace Poe, chairman of the Senate committee on public services, the passage of the proposed measure will not only generate jobs for Filipinos but will also allow the Philippines to further

recover from the effects of the pandemic and be more competitive when it comes to attracting foreign direct investments.

The reconciled PSA amendments identified public utilities as follows:

- Distribution of electricity
- Transmission of electricity
- Petroleum and petroleum products pipeline transmission systems
- Water pipeline distribution systems and wastewater pipeline systems, including sewerage pipeline systems
- Seaports
- Public Utility Vehicles (PUVs)

Senator Grace Poe assured the public that safeguards and security provisions were included in the proposed measure on the possible risks brought by foreign ownership and the liberalization of specific industries. Senator Poe also highlighted a key provision prohibiting foreign state-owned enterprises from owning capital in any public service classified as a public utility or critical infrastructure (such as telecommunications and other vital services declared by the President).

It was signed into law last March 21, 2022 and became RA No. 11659.

Measures to Protect Delivery Services (SB 2302/HB 7805)

The proposed measure seeks to protect those engaged in food, grocery, and pharmacy delivery services. Since delivery services have been the top option for citizens since the pandemic hit, many hoax orderings have pestered the operations of the said industry. To combat this, SB 2302 aims to serve as a formal basis to penalize erring individuals in order to protect courier drivers and vehicle owners alike.



The bill was approved on Third Reading on January 17, 2022.

The HOR version of the bill, HB 7805, was approved by the House on November 24, 2020.

Motorcycles-For-Hire Act (HB 10571/SB 1341)

The Motorcycles-for-Hire-Act or HB 10571 aims to regulate motorcycles' operation by requiring them to be registered with the Land Transportation Office (LTO) to ensure their roadworthiness. Under the measure, the LTO shall promulgate all the pertinent operational guidelines set forth the requirements for the issuance of a professional driver's license, including the license examination content appropriate for the operation of a motorcycle-for-hire.

According to the bill, only riders who were issued professional driver's licenses shall be allowed to operate motorcycles for hire. Also, the LTO shall conduct a continuing safety training program for licensed drivers for motorcycles-for-hire with a curriculum duly certified by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, provided that the licensed riders shall attend at least one safety training seminar every year.

Another salient feature of the bill pertains to the proper standards and specifications for motorcycles to be allowed to operate with the safety of the riders and passengers in mind. Pursuant to the bill, no modifications shall be made on any motorcycles-for-hire, except for the installation of the appropriate accessories such as motorcycle bracket, top box, luggage carrier, saddlebag, step board or footrest, etc. as prescribed by the Department of Trade and Industry – Bureau of Philippine Standards (DTI-BPS) and as approved by the LTO.

The bill was approved on the third reading last January 31, 2022, just before the House adjourns on February 5.

The Senate version of the bill, SB 1341, is currently pending its second reading since Feb 18, 2020.

Digital Payments Act (SB 1764/8992)

The Digital Payments act or SB 1764 was created to adopt digital payments, particularly in all government agencies, offices, and local government units. Since consumers have experienced the convenience of making digital payments—be it for buying goods, the payment of services, or their monthly bills, it is only logical to adopt it with government transactions so that physically going to and lining up at city hall or other offices will no longer be necessary.

The adoption of digital payments is exceedingly significant in line with the need for contactless transactions through financial technologies in transitioning to the new normal.

The HOR version of the bill was approved by the House last March 25, 2021.

Migrant Workers Act (SB 2234/10802)

The Migrant Workers Act will entirely create a new government agency that will be dedicated to overseeing the affairs and protecting the rights of millions of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). More specifically, it seeks to turn the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) into the Department of Migrant Workers, which will oversee all policies protecting the welfare of OFWs. Furthermore, it will be tasked to regulate the recruitment, employment, and deployment of OFWs and launch investigations and file cases concerning illegal recruitment and human trafficking cases in the said industry.

The measure was ratified last December 15, 2021.

Other Proposed Measures Approved by the HOR

- HB 10575, enhancing the competitiveness of Philippine maritime trade by strengthening the oversight functions of relevant government agencies over charges imposed by international shipping lines
- HB 10612, providing for full and effective implementation of international maritime instruments to which the Philippines is a state party
- HB 10647, granting additional benefits to Filipino centenarians and recognizing octogenarians and nonagenarians
- HB 10648, granting a legislative franchise to Oro Broadcasting Network Inc.
- HB 10650, establishing apex hospitals in every region of the country and providing funds for them
- HB 10672, renaming the Literacy Coordinating Council to National Literacy Council, strengthening its powers and functions, and expanding its membership structure and support mechanisms
- HB 10690, prescribing the use of neo-ethnic Philippine textiles in the academic regalia of all state universities and colleges
- HB 10625, creating the Department of Economics and Development Planning
- HB 10657, promoting Philippine indigenous and traditional writing systems and providing for their protection, preservation, and conservation
- HB 10658, strengthening the policies on anti-trafficking in persons and appropriating funds for it, amending for the purpose Republic Act 9208, as amended, otherwise known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003
- HB 10693, converting the Provincial Science and Technology Center into the Provincial Science and Technology Office in every province and appropriating funds for it, repealing for the purpose RA 6959
- HB 10696, institutionalizing the practice of extended producer responsibility on plastic products, amending for this purpose RA 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000
- HB 10698, strengthening the Sangguniang Kabataan by institutionalizing additional reforms to revitalize youth participation in local governance and by providing honorarium and other benefits and privileges
- HB 10703, strengthening the protection against online or offline child sexual abuse or exploitation

Legislative Calendar (Third Regular Session)

- Adjournment of Session: February 5, 2022 to May 22, 2022
- Resumption of Session: May 23, 2022 to June 3, 2022
(Sine Die Adjournment)
- Adjournment of Session: June 04-July 24, 2022

¹ This section is an abridged version of the upcoming foreign policy paper by Prof. Victor Andres C. Manhit entitled "A Responsive and Strategic Foreign Policy Outlook in an Inter-connected and Multipolar World (2022)."

² Wade, R. (2011). Emerging World Order? From Multipolarity to Multilateralism in the G20, the World Bank, and the IMF. *Politics and Society*, 39(3), 347- 378.

³ Miram, D. (2020, December 16). A search for independence in president Duterte's foreign policy. *East-West Center*. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/search-independence-in-president-duterte%E2%80%99s-foreign-policy>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Manhit, D. (2020, December 26). Navigating a multipolar Indo-Pacific. *INQUIRER.Net*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/136432/navigating-a-multipolar-indo-pacific>

⁶ United States Department of State. (2022, February 11). Joint Statement on Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Retrieved from United States Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-quad-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/>

⁷ Lee-Brago, P. (2021, December 15). South China Sea Code of Conduct negotiations 'went nowhere,' Locsin admits. Retrieved from PhilStar Global: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/12/15/2148068/south-china-sea-code-conduct-negotiations-went-nowhere-locsin-admits>

⁸ Manhit, D. (2021, October 9). Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region. *INQUIRER.Net*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/145073/multilateralism-in-the-indo-pacific-region>

⁹ de Castro, R. (2022). A National Security Strategy (NSS) for the 17th Philippine President: The Case for A Limited Balancing Strategy (upcoming Stratbase ADR Institute publications).





POLÍTICA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY



STRATBASE ADR INSTITUTE

is an independent international and strategic research organization with the principal goal of addressing the issues affecting the Philippines and East Asia

The Financial Tower
6794 Ayala Avenue, Makati City
Philippines 1226

V (632) 88921751
F (632) 88921754

www.stratbase.ph

Copyright © 2022 Stratbase ADR Institute
All rights reserved.