

# POLÍTIKA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY

3RD QUARTER



## **Inclusive Institutions and Governance: Breaking the Chains of Corruption**

This section explores how inclusive governance and anti-corruption reforms, including lifestyle checks, digital platforms, and citizen engagement, are empowering Filipinos and fostering transparency, accountability, and equitable development in the Philippines

## **Guarding the Waters: The Philippines' Strategic Shift toward Sovereignty and Regional Stability**

The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept strengthens the Philippines' maritime security, counters China's expansion, protects sovereignty, and reinforces regional stability through strategic partnerships and enhanced defense capabilities in the Indo-Pacific

## **Legislative Updates and Developments**

Key legislative updates include the Government Optimization Act, E-Government Act, and Virology Institute Act, alongside 44 priority bills for the 20th Congress, focusing on governance, infrastructure, and economic reforms

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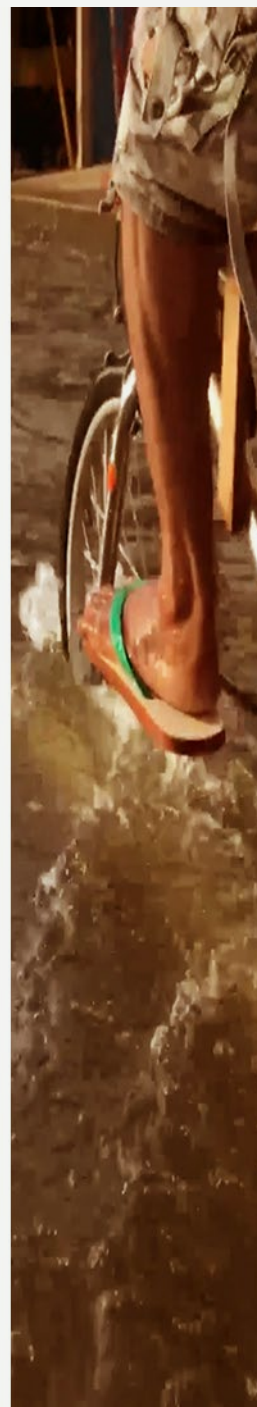
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## OVERVIEW

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter issue of POLITIKA highlights the Philippines' ongoing efforts to address systemic challenges, strengthen governance, and secure its sovereignty amidst domestic and geopolitical pressures. With a focus on inclusive governance, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration has implemented bold anti-corruption measures, including lifestyle checks, digital platforms for citizen engagement, and independent investigations into anomalies in flood control projects. These initiatives aim to foster transparency, accountability, and public trust, while addressing deeply entrenched issues like patronage politics and collusion.

The issue also explores the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC), a transformative strategy that redefines the Philippines' national security approach. By shifting to a maritime-centric defense posture, the CADC seeks to protect the country's vast archipelagic territory and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from external threats, particularly China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea. The CADC emphasizes anti-access and area denial capabilities, enhanced maritime domain awareness, and strengthened alliances with key partners such as the United States, Japan, and Australia. It positions the Philippines as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific's security architecture, ensuring both national survival and regional stability.

On the legislative front, seven priority bills were signed into law during the third quarter of 2025, including the Government Optimization Act, E-Government Act, and Virology Institute of the Philippines Act. These laws aim to modernize governance, enhance digital services, and strengthen public health infrastructure. Additionally, the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) has identified 44 priority legislations for the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, focusing on universal healthcare, environmental sustainability, education reforms, and economic resilience.

The First Regular Session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Philippines started last July 28, 2025, and ran until October 10, 2025. Congress was adjourned on October 11, 2025 and will continue to be so until November 9, 2025.

This issue of POLITIKA underscores the importance of institutionalizing anti-corruption reforms, fostering public trust, and promoting inclusive and adaptive governance. By addressing interconnected challenges, the Philippines is paving the way for a future of transparency, equitable development, and national security, ensuring a resilient and prosperous nation for all Filipinos.

## I. INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE: BREAKING THE CHAINS OF CORRUPTION

Inclusive institutions and governance are the backbone of a fair and thriving society. They ensure that power and resources are distributed equitably, laws are applied fairly, and every citizen has a voice in shaping the nation's future. In the fight against corruption, these institutions play a critical role by fostering transparency, accountability, and public trust. Without them, corruption thrives, undermining economic growth, eroding public confidence, and deepening inequality. In the Philippines, the push for inclusive governance has become more urgent as the country grapples with systemic corruption and the need for reforms that truly benefit all Filipinos.

Recent developments in the Philippines highlight both the progress and challenges in combating corruption. President Marcos Jr.'s administration has taken bold steps, such as launching lifestyle checks on government officials, creating an independent commission to investigate anomalies in flood control projects, and blacklisting contractors involved in ghost projects. These efforts, coupled with digital platforms and initiatives, signal a commitment to transparency and citizen engagement. However, the persistence of practices, such as political dynasties and patronage politics, hinders the full realization of inclusive governance.

The fight against corruption is not just about punishing wrongdoers; it is about building systems that prevent corruption from taking root in the first place. Inclusive institutions and governance are essential to this mission. By empowering citizens, fostering collaboration between sectors, and ensuring that government actions are transparent and accountable, the Philippines can create a sustainable path toward integrity and progress. The journey is long, but with inclusive reforms, the nation can break free from the cycle of corruption and build a future where every Filipino has a fair chance to succeed.

### The Role of Inclusive Institutions in Anti-Corruption Reforms

Inclusive institutions are the foundation of a corruption-proof society. They create systems where transparency and accountability are not just ideals but everyday practices. By ensuring that government processes are open and accessible, inclusive institutions reduce opportunities for corruption and empower citizens to hold leaders accountable. For example, digital platforms like the “Sumbong sa Pangulo” website allow ordinary Filipinos to report anomalies in public projects, giving them a direct role in exposing corruption. This kind of citizen engagement is a powerful tool in fostering accountability and ensuring that public officials act in the best interest of the people.

Another key aspect of inclusive institutions is about the ability to level the playing field. When systems are designed to be fair and equitable, marginalized communities gain access to resources and opportunities that were previously out of reach. For instance, lifestyle checks on government officials, combined with digitalization efforts, help ensure that public servants are held to the same standards as everyone else. These measures not only deter corruption but also build public trust in government institutions. When citizens see that leaders are held accountable, they are more likely to believe in the system and actively participate in governance.

Inclusive institutions also empower communities by making sure that resources are distributed fairly and efficiently. Programs like public reporting mechanisms and e-governance platforms reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and ensure that government services reach those who need them most. By prioritizing transparency and citizen participation, these institutions create a culture of accountability that makes corruption harder to hide. In the Philippines, the push for inclusive governance is a step in the right direction, showing that when institutions are designed to serve everyone, they can become powerful allies in the fight against corruption.

### Recent Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Philippines

The Philippines has recently taken significant steps to address corruption, signalling a renewed commitment to transparency and accountability. One of the most notable initiatives is the creation of an independent commission to investigate anomalies in flood control projects. This move, spearheaded by President Marcos Jr., aims to uncover and address “ghost projects”

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and substandard infrastructure that have cost the country billions. By blacklisting contractors involved in these schemes and requiring courtesy resignations from ranking officials in the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the government is sending a strong message that corruption will no longer be tolerated.

Another key effort is the implementation of lifestyle checks on government officials, starting with personnel in the DPWH. These checks aim to identify unexplained wealth and ensure that public servants are living within their means. This initiative is complemented by digital venues that facilitate thousands of complaints from citizens about irregularities in public projects. By giving ordinary Filipinos a platform to report corruption, the government is fostering a culture of accountability and empowering citizens to play an active role in governance.

Digitalization has also become a cornerstone of the country's anti-corruption strategy. The government is leveraging technology to streamline processes, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, and minimize opportunities for graft. For example, e-governance platforms are being developed to make public services more accessible and transparent. These digital tools not only improve efficiency but also ensure that transactions are traceable, making it harder for corrupt practices to go unnoticed. This shift toward digital governance reflects the administration's recognition that technology can be a powerful ally in the fight against corruption.

While these efforts are promising, challenges remain. The persistent culture of patronage politics continues to undermine the full realization of inclusive governance. However, the recent anti-corruption measures demonstrate that progress is possible when there is political will and citizen engagement. By building on these initiatives and addressing systemic issues, the Philippines can move closer to a future where corruption is the exception, not the norm. These reforms are a step in the right direction, showing that with inclusive institutions and active public participation, meaningful change is within reach.

## Challenges to Sustaining Anti-Corruption Reforms

While the Philippines has made strides in combating corruption, sustaining these reforms remains a significant challenge. One major obstacle is the deeply entrenched system of political dynasties and patronage politics. These practices concentrate power and resources in the hands of a few families, making it difficult to implement reforms that threaten their interests. For example, efforts to investigate corruption in infrastructure projects often face resistance from powerful individuals who benefit from the status quo. Breaking this cycle requires not only strong political will but also active citizen participation to demand accountability and fairness.

Another challenge is the lack of institutional resilience. Many anti-corruption initiatives rely heavily on the leadership of key individuals, such as the president or department heads. While these leaders may push for reforms, the absence of strong, independent institutions means that progress can easily be reversed when leadership changes. For instance, lifestyle checks, and blacklisting of corrupt contractors are promising steps, but they need to be institutionalized to ensure they continue beyond the current administration. To this end, building robust systems that can withstand political shifts is essential for long-term success.

Corruption is also fuelled by systemic inefficiencies, such as bureaucratic red tape and weak enforcement of laws. These inefficiencies create opportunities for graft and make it harder for reforms to take root. While digitalization efforts are helping streamline processes and improve transparency, the transition to e-governance is still in its early stages. Ensuring that these systems are accessible to all Filipinos, especially those in marginalized communities, is crucial to preventing corruption from simply shifting to new areas. Sustained investment in technology and training is needed to make these reforms effective and inclusive.

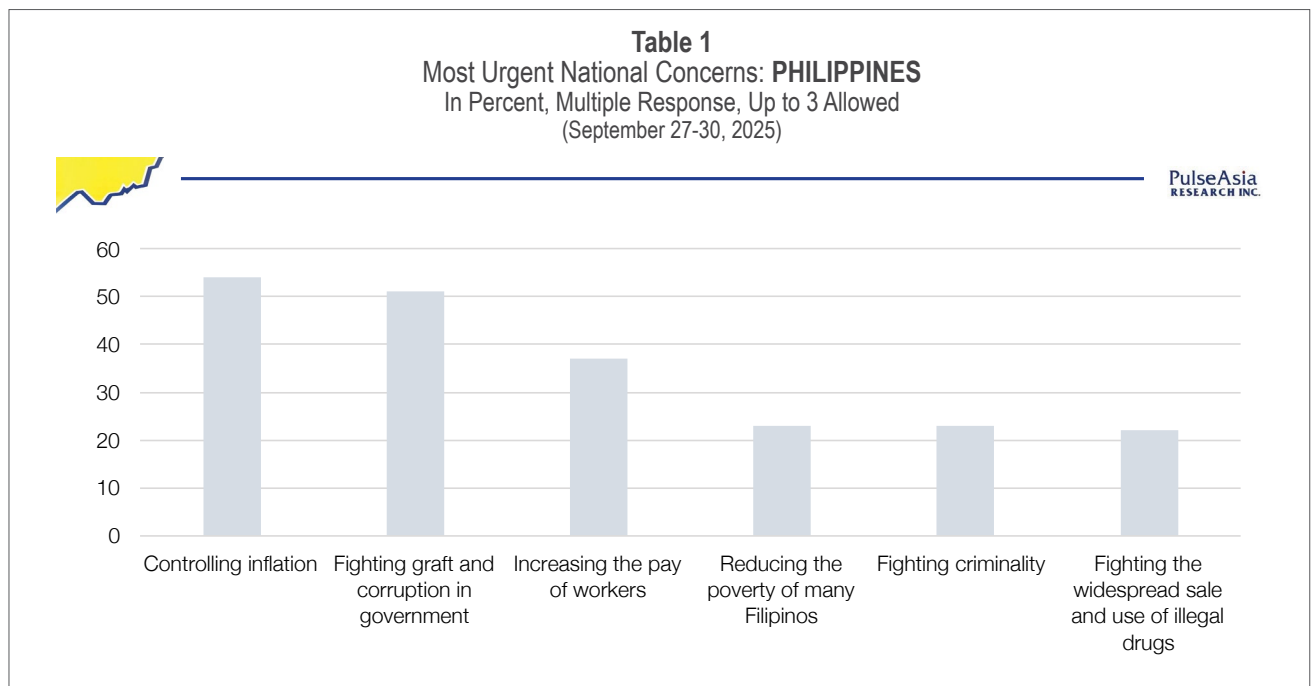
Despite these challenges, there is reason for cautious optimism. The government's recent initiatives, such as the independent commission for flood control projects and the people's reporting website, show that change is possible when citizens and leaders work together. By addressing systemic issues and building inclusive institutions, the Philippines can create a culture of accountability that is upheld through political timelines. Sustaining anti-corruption reforms will require persistence, collaboration, and a commitment to transparency, but the progress made so far demonstrates that the fight against corruption is not only necessary—it is achievable.

## Public Perception and Priority Issues

On top of the efforts and strides in combating corruption, understanding public sentiment is crucial to sustaining and refining these efforts. Survey data on urgent national concerns, the administration's performance on key issues, and the priorities identified by communities offer valuable insights into the alignment between government initiatives and citizen expectations. By examining these perceptions, policymakers can identify gaps, build trust, and ensure that reforms address the real needs of the people. This feedback serves as a vital compass for shaping inclusive governance strategies and overcoming systemic challenges, paving the way for reforms that are not only effective but also deeply rooted in public support.

### Most Urgent National Concerns

The latest survey on urgent national concerns by Pulse Asia Research, Inc. in September 27-30, 2025 reveals that controlling inflation is the top priority for Filipinos, with 54% identifying it as their most pressing issue. Other major concerns include fighting corruption in government (51%), increasing workers' pay (37%), and addressing criminality and poverty (both at 23%). Issues like illegal drugs, tax reduction, and assistance to farmers also ranked as significant, though to a lesser extent. Concerns such as flood control and terrorism were identified by only 1% of respondents, showing they are less urgent compared to economic and governance-related issues.



In a comparative perspective, the survey results from June and September 2025 highlight the shifting priorities of Filipinos as they navigate pressing national issues. Controlling inflation remained the top concern, though its urgency slightly decreased from 62% in June to 54% in September. This shows that while inflation continues to weigh heavily on people's minds, other issues are gaining traction. Increasing workers' pay, another major concern, also saw a decline from 51% to 37%, possibly reflecting a growing focus on broader systemic challenges.

Most strikingly, fighting graft and corruption in government surged from 24% in June to 51% in September, signalling a significant rise in public demand for accountability and transparency in governance. This shift suggests that Filipinos are increasingly prioritizing ethical leadership and inclusive governance alongside economic stability.

Other urgent concerns, such as reducing poverty and creating jobs, remained important but saw slight changes in urgency. These findings paint a dynamic picture of the public's evolving priorities, with economic challenges like inflation and wages still at the forefront, but governance issues like corruption gaining prominence. The data underscores the need for the government to address both immediate economic pressures and long-term systemic reforms.



## Comparative Performance Ratings on Selected National Issues

The comparative performance ratings of the national administration show mixed results. While there were improvements in areas like increasing workers' pay (+14%) and creating more jobs (+6%), the government's performance declined significantly in responding to calamities (-13%), promoting peace (-14%), and fighting criminality (-11%). Notably, dissatisfaction with the administration's efforts to fight corruption increased by 25%, and dissatisfaction with poverty reduction rose by 10%. Inflation control saw a slight improvement, with dissatisfaction dropping by 17%, but it remains a major concern.

The year-on-year performance ratings of the national administration show a wide clamor for improvement in addressing the nation's most pressing concerns. While there were small gains in areas like helping farmers and tackling hunger, the public expressed growing dissatisfaction in critical issues such as protecting OFWs, responding to calamities, and promoting peace, all of which saw notable declines in approval. The sharp rise in disapproval in fighting criminality and enforcing laws fairly suggests that Filipinos are demanding stronger and more consistent action in ensuring justice and safety.

On the positive side, the administration's efforts to address inflation saw improved approval ratings, indicating some progress in easing economic pressures. However, the overall picture highlights the need for the government to step up its performance, especially in areas where public trust has weakened, to better align with the people's expectations and priorities.

**Table 2**  
Comparative Performance Ratings of the National Administration  
on Selected National Issues: **PHILIPPINES**  
(September 2024 and September 2025)



PulseAsia  
RESEARCH INC.

Selected National Issues	Approval		Change*	Undecided		Change*	Disapproval		Change*
	Sep 24 (A)	Sep 25 (B)		Sep 24 (C)	Sep 25 (D)		Sep 24 (E)	Sep 25 (F)	
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	65	58	-7	24	26	+2	10	16	+6
Responding to the needs of areas affected by calamities	59	46	-13	32	22	-10	9	31	+22
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	47	43	-4	34	33	-1	18	24	+6
Providing assistance to farmers including selling their products	36	39	+3	41	28	-13	23	33	+10
Increasing the pay of workers	21	35	+14	41	24	-17	38	42	+4
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	40	35	-5	41	35	-6	19	29	+10
Creating more jobs	28	34	+6	40	30	-10	31	35	+4
Promoting peace in the country	47	33	-14	36	32	-4	17	35	+18
Fighting criminality	42	31	-11	37	25	-12	21	44	+23
Enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people	39	29	-10	45	36	-9	17	34	+17
Addressing the problem of involuntary hunger	21	25	+4	42	32	-10	37	43	+6
Fighting the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs	19	-	-	20	-	-	61	-	-
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	14	18	+4	39	25	-14	47	57	+10
Fighting graft and corruption in government	18	17	-1	38	15	-23	44	69	+25
Controlling inflation	2	16	+14	17	20	+3	81	64	-17

Overall, the data indicate a mixed performance by the National Administration, with notable declines in approval for issues such as responding to calamities, promoting peace, and fighting criminality, while there were improvements in areas like increasing workers' pay and controlling inflation. Disapproval ratings generally increased across most issues, suggesting growing dissatisfaction among respondents.

## Most Important Community Issues

The survey results on the “most important issues in their community that the national government leaders should address” highlight key priorities for inclusive governance in the Philippines. The data reveals that corruption (54%) is the most pressing concern, emphasizing the public’s demand for transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership in governance.

Poverty (45%) and job opportunities (34%) follow as critical issues, underscoring the need for inclusive economic policies that address inequality and create sustainable livelihoods. Healthcare (32%) and affordable food (31%) are also significant concerns, reflecting the importance of accessible social services and necessities for all citizens.

Other notable issues include illegal drugs (29%), peace and order (26%), and access to quality education (22%), which point to the need for comprehensive policies that ensure safety, stability, and equitable access to education.

These insights manifest the public’s call for inclusive governance that prioritizes addressing systemic corruption, reducing poverty, improving social services, and fostering economic opportunities. The data underscores the importance of a government that is responsive to the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities while ensuring equitable development across all sectors.

**Table 3**  
Most Important Issues in their Community that the National Government Leaders Should Address:  
**PHILIPPINES**  
In Percent, Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed  
(September 27-30, 2025)



PulseAsia  
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%								
What do you think are the most important issues in your community that our national government leaders should address? You may choose up to three answers	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Corruption	54	45	52	54	62	61	53	48
Poverty	45	51	41	47	49	36	44	62
Job opportunities	34	38	39	36	19	26	37	30
Healthcare	32	39	35	26	28	41	29	36
Affordable food	31	31	25	35	41	35	31	26
Illegal drugs	29	28	27	25	37	36	28	25
Peace and order	26	26	24	24	33	23	27	28
Access to quality education	22	21	26	19	18	17	22	31
Others	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Flooding	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Irrigation for farmers	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Road constructions/Repairs	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tight execution of the law	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0



As President Marcos Jr. prepares to tackle these challenges in the remaining years of his term, the surveys provide a clear roadmap of the issues Filipinos want prioritized, offering an opportunity for meaningful action that aligns with the people's needs.

## Political Convergences Between Concerns, Ratings, and Community Issues

The survey results on community issues, urgent national concerns, and comparative ratings of the national administration reveal critical political intersections that highlight the alignment—or lack thereof—between public priorities and government performance. Controlling inflation emerges as the top urgent national concern (54%), reflecting the political pressure on the administration to address economic stability. Similarly, poverty reduction ranks high among community issues (45%), underscoring the public's demand for inclusive economic policies that tackle inequality and improve livelihoods. These economic concerns are politically significant, as they directly impact public perception of the administration's effectiveness.

Fighting corruption is another major concern, with 51% of Filipinos identifying it as an urgent national issue and 54% highlighting it as a key community priority. This convergence signals a growing demand for ethical leadership and transparent governance. However, dissatisfaction with the administration's performance in fighting corruption has risen sharply, with disapproval ratings increasing from 44% in 2024 to 69% in 2025. This disconnect between public expectations and government action poses a significant political challenge for the administration, as it struggles to regain trust amid heightened scrutiny.

Healthcare (32%) and affordable food (31%) also feature prominently among community issues, reflecting the public's focus on basic needs. These concerns align with broader national priorities like poverty and inflation, further emphasizing the political necessity of addressing systemic issues that affect the daily lives of Filipinos. Similarly, job creation (34%) and increasing workers' pay (37%) are critical priorities, with mixed results in the administration's performance. While approval for increasing workers' pay improved (+14%), disapproval for job creation rose (+4%), highlighting the need for more effective policies to address employment challenges.

The political implications of these convergences are clear: the administration must prioritize reforms that address the interconnected challenges of economic stability, corruption, and basic needs to align with public sentiment. The sharp rise in dissatisfaction across key governance issues, such as fighting criminality (+23% disapproval) and enforcing laws fairly (+17% disapproval), further underscores the urgency for the government to demonstrate accountability and transparency. These areas of discontent reflect a growing demand for stronger leadership and more consistent action in ensuring justice and safety.

The alignment between community priorities and national concerns highlights the importance of responsive and inclusive governance. The administration's declining ratings in critical areas suggest a widening gap between public expectations and government performance, which could have significant political consequences. To bridge this gap, policymakers must focus on reforms that resonate with the needs of citizens, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups. By addressing these convergences, the government can rebuild public trust, strengthen institutional accountability, and foster equitable development, ensuring that political leadership is both effective and aligned with the aspirations of the Filipino people.

## The Role of Inclusive Governance in Sustaining Reforms

Inclusive governance refers to a system of leadership and decision-making that ensures fairness, transparency, and accountability, while actively involving all sectors of society in shaping policies and programs. When governance is inclusive, and when reforms are not only implemented but also sustained over time, they are more likely to address the real needs of the people rather than serve the interests of a select few. Further, inclusive governance emphasizes equitable distribution of resources, accessible public services, and policy stability, aiming to build trust, reduce inequality, and create a society where every Filipino feels valued and included in national development.

Adaptive governance complements inclusive governance by introducing flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances. It emphasizes the importance of learning from past experiences, engaging diverse stakeholders, and

continuously evolving policies to address emerging challenges. For instance, the push for digitalization in government services, such as e-governance platforms, benefits from adaptive governance principles by allowing systems to be updated and improved based on user feedback and technological advancements. This adaptability ensures that reforms remain effective and relevant over time.

One of the biggest advantages of inclusive and adaptive governance is their ability to build trust between the government and the people. When citizens see that their concerns are being heard and acted upon, they are more likely to support reforms and demand accountability. Initiatives like lifestyle checks on government officials and the blacklisting of corrupt contractors show that the government is serious about addressing corruption. However, these efforts are more effective when citizens actively participate, whether by reporting anomalies or advocating for better policies. Trust is a two-way street, and inclusive governance strengthened by adaptive practices fortifies this relationship.

Inclusive and adaptive governance also make reforms more resilient to political changes. By involving multiple stakeholders—local governments, private organizations, and community groups—in the reform process, the responsibility for sustaining these efforts is shared. This reduces the risk of reforms being abandoned when new leaders take office. Adaptive governance ensures that systems are designed to evolve and withstand political shifts, making reforms more durable and impactful. For example, the transition to e-governance platforms reflects adaptive governance principles, as these systems can be scaled and modified to meet the needs of marginalized communities and address systemic inefficiencies.

Ultimately, inclusive and adaptive governance create a cycle of progress where reforms lead to greater public trust, which in turn drives demand for more accountability and transparency. They ensure that no one is left behind and that policies are designed to benefit everyone, not just the powerful. Sustaining reforms requires more than just strong leadership—it requires a system that values participation, fairness, collaboration, and adaptability. With inclusive and adaptive governance, the Philippines can build a future where reforms are not just temporary solutions but lasting changes that improve the lives of all Filipinos.

## Public Trust and Institutional Accountability: Insights and Challenges

Corruption is a deeply ingrained issue in the Philippines, and Filipinos have strong opinions about what constitutes corrupt behavior. Based on the same Pulse Asia Research, Inc. survey, most people believe that accepting or giving bribes, misusing public funds or company resources, and offering or receiving kickbacks are clear acts of corruption. Insider trading, tax evasion, nepotism, and failing to disclose conflicts of interest are also seen as corrupt, though to a lesser extent. This shows that Filipinos are highly aware of various forms of corruption, whether in the public or private sector, and recognize its damaging effects on society.

### Perceptions of Corruption

The overwhelming majority of Filipinos (97%) agree that corruption in government is widespread, with many describing it as “very widespread.” This sentiment is consistent across all regions and socio-economic classes, highlighting a shared frustration with the state of governance. Only a negligible percentage of respondents believe corruption is not widespread, underscoring the near-universal acknowledgment of its prevalence. This collective awareness is a critical step toward addressing the issue, as it reflects a population that is not blind to the realities of corruption.

Adding to this concern, 85% of Filipinos believe corruption in government has increased over the past year. This perception is echoed across different demographics, suggesting that recent scandals and controversies have heightened public awareness of the problem. While a small minority thinks corruption has decreased or stayed the same, the dominant view is that the situation is worsening. This growing frustration could serve as a catalyst for stronger calls for accountability and reform, as people demand action from their leaders.

Interestingly, while many Filipinos are disheartened by the prevalence of corruption, 59% still see it as a “normal part of politics” in the country. This acceptance of corruption as a political norm is troubling, as it implies a level of resignation among the public. However, it also highlights the need for systemic change to break this cycle. The fact that nearly half of Mindanao

respondents disagree with this view offers a glimmer of hope, suggesting that some regions may be more optimistic about the possibility of a corruption-proof political system. Overall, the survey results paint a picture of a population that is both aware of and deeply affected by corruption, yet still hopeful for change.

## Investigations and Accountability

The ongoing investigations into corruption in flood control projects have sparked mixed reactions among Filipinos, but the majority view them as a genuine effort to expose wrongdoing and hold those responsible accountable. According to the survey, 54% of respondents believe that the congressional investigations are aimed at uncovering corruption and punishing those involved. While some see these efforts as a response to public outrage or a way to pressure political rivals, the prevailing sentiment is that these investigations are a step in the right direction. This shows that many Filipinos still have hope that the government can take meaningful action against corruption.

Encouragingly, 71% of Filipinos believe that government officials found guilty of irregularities in flood control projects will be punished. This optimism is shared across regions and socio-economic classes, with many respondents confident that accountability is possible. While a small percentage remains skeptical, the dominant belief in the likelihood of punishment reflects a growing demand for justice. This sentiment is critical, as it underscores the public's expectation that investigations will lead to tangible consequences for those who misuse public funds.

When it comes to the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee's investigations, 45% of Filipinos think these efforts are likely to uncover the truth and hold those involved accountable. Some 38% feel the same about the House InfraCom Committee's investigations, even as it has been concluded and turned over to the ICI. While some respondents believe these inquiries may have limited impact or are merely for show, the plurality opinion is that these investigations have the potential to deliver meaningful results. This suggests that Filipinos are cautiously optimistic about the ability of legislative bodies to address corruption, even amidst doubts about the effectiveness of past efforts.

Overall, the survey on perceptions of corruption reveals a population that is engaged and hopeful about the fight against corruption. While skepticism exists, the belief that investigations can lead to accountability is a positive sign. It reflects a public that is not only aware of the problem but also willing to support efforts to address it. These findings highlight the importance of transparency and follow-through in government investigations, as Filipinos are watching closely and expecting real change. The challenge now lies in ensuring that these investigations lead to concrete actions that restore public trust and deter future corruption.

## Collusion and Trust in Institutions

Filipinos overwhelmingly believe that collusion exists among government officials and private contractors in the misuse of funds for flood control projects. A striking 90% of respondents agree with this view, with many strongly convinced that executive officials, legislators, and contractors are working together to exploit public resources. This sentiment is consistent across all regions and socio-economic classes, reflecting a shared frustration with systemic corruption. While a small minority remains undecided or disagrees, the dominant belief in collusion highlights the public's awareness of how deeply entrenched corruption is in infrastructure projects. This collective understanding is a powerful foundation for demanding accountability and reform.

## Effectiveness of Public Actions

Filipinos are divided on the effectiveness of public protests in ensuring accountability for corruption, but a significant portion sees them as a powerful tool for change. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) believe that rallies and protests can effectively hold government officials and others involved in corruption accountable. This belief is particularly strong in Mindanao (56%) and among the poorest socio-economic class (61%), reflecting the public's desire to act and demand justice. While some remain undecided or skeptical about the impact of protests, the prevailing sentiment highlights the importance of collective action in pressuring authorities to address corruption. These findings emphasize that public demonstrations, when combined with institutional efforts, can play a vital role in fostering accountability and reform.



As the Philippines continues its fight against systemic corruption and strives to build inclusive governance, understanding public perceptions and institutional trust becomes increasingly vital. The latest data on corruption, accountability, collusion, and the effectiveness of public actions provide critical insights into the alignment between government initiatives and citizen expectations. These findings highlight the challenges of fostering transparency and trust in institutions while addressing deeply entrenched practices that undermine progress. By examining these perceptions, policymakers can identify gaps, refine strategies, and ensure that reforms resonate with the needs of the people.

## Awareness and Trust Ratings of the President and Vice President

Building on the existing insights into public trust and institutional accountability, it is essential to examine the awareness and trust ratings of key leaders, such as President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte. Understanding how Filipinos perceive their leadership provides valuable context for evaluating the effectiveness of governance and the alignment of public sentiment with ongoing reforms. This offers a deeper perspective of the role of leadership in fostering transparency, accountability, and trust in institutions.

From July 2024 to September 2025, President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (PBBM) maintained consistently high awareness ratings, hovering around 99-100%, according to the latest Social Weather Stations survey. While his “much trust” ratings experienced a decline over the period, starting at 64% in July 2024 and dropping to 43% by September 2025, it is worth noting that his trust ratings rebounded slightly in June 2025, reaching 48%. This demonstrates his ability to regain public confidence despite fluctuations. The steady awareness levels indicate that PBBM remains a prominent figure in the public eye, and his administration’s efforts to address pressing national issues may have contributed to his ability to maintain relevance and trust among a significant portion of the population.

In contrast, Vice President Sara Duterte also enjoyed high awareness ratings, consistently at 98-100% throughout the same period. However, her “much trust” ratings showed a less stable trajectory. Starting at 65% in July 2024, her trust ratings fluctuated, peaking at 61% in June 2025 before dropping to 53% by September 2025. While her trust ratings were generally higher than PBBM’s during most of the period, the decline in September 2025 suggests potential challenges in sustaining public confidence. This could be attributed to perceived inconsistencies in her leadership or public dissatisfaction with her performance in addressing critical issues.

Overall, while both leaders experienced fluctuations in their trust ratings, PBBM’s ability to recover trust in mid-2025 highlights his resilience and adaptability as a leader. On the other hand, VP Sara Duterte’s declining trust ratings toward the end of the period may indicate growing public scrutiny or dissatisfaction with her leadership style. The data underscore the importance of consistent and effective governance in maintaining public trust, with PBBM demonstrating a stronger capacity to navigate challenges and regain public confidence.

**Table 4**  
Awareness and Trust Ratings of Ferdinand Marcos, Jr: **PHILIPPINES**  
In Percent, Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed  
(July 2024 – September 2025)

Month	Aware	Much Trust	Undecided	Little Trust
Jul 2024	99%	64%	14%	21%
Sep 2024	99%	57%	17%	25%
Dec 2024	98%	54%	19%	25%
Jan 2025	99%	50%	22%	26%
Feb 2025	99%	43%	22%	32%
Mar 2025	99%	37%	21%	40%
Apr 2025	99%	36%	23%	40%
May 2025	100%	38%	21%	39%
Jun 2025	99%	48%	21%	30%
Sep 2025	99%	43%	21%	36%

**Table 5**  
**Awareness and Trust Ratings of Sara Duterte: PHILIPPINES**  
 In Percent, Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed  
 (July 2024 – September 2025)

Month	Aware	Much Trust	Undecided	Little Trust
Jul 2024	99%	65%	13%	21%
Sep 2024	99%	55%	16%	27%
Dec 2024	98%	52%	17%	29%
Jan 2025	99%	49%	20%	30%
Feb 2025	99%	50%	20%	27%
Mar 2025	99%	57%	17%	25%
Apr 2025	99%	58%	20%	22%
May 2025	100%	60%	16%	23%
Jun 2025	99%	61%	14%	23%
Sep 2025	99%	53%	18%	28%

## Recommendations for Institutionalizing Anti-Corruption Reforms

To effectively combat corruption and ensure accountability, the Philippines must focus on institutionalizing reforms through inclusive and adaptive governance strategies. Key recommendations include:

1. **Strengthen Public Trust Through Transparent Leadership.** The fluctuating trust ratings of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte highlight the need for consistent and transparent leadership. To rebuild and sustain public confidence, both leaders should prioritize regular communication about anti-corruption initiatives, ensuring that progress and challenges are openly shared with the public. This transparency can foster trust and demonstrate accountability.

2. **Institutionalize Anti-Corruption Mechanisms Beyond Presidential Terms.** Given the reliance on individual leadership for reforms, it is crucial to institutionalize anti-corruption measures to ensure their continuity regardless of changes in administration. Initiatives such as lifestyle checks, blacklisting corrupt contractors, and digital reporting platforms should be codified into law or integrated into independent bodies like the Office of the Ombudsman or the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI). This reduces the risk of reforms being reversed due to political shifts.

3. **Strengthen the independence, transparency, and accountability of oversight bodies like the ICI and the DPWH** to effectively institutionalize anti-corruption reforms. This can be achieved by appointing non-partisan leaders, increasing funding for oversight activities, and ensuring public access to their findings and decisions. Expanding digital governance and citizen engagement platforms, such as e-governance systems and the “Sumbong sa Pangulo” website, is equally critical to empower citizens to report corruption, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, and enhance public participation, particularly for marginalized communities. Addressing systemic issues like patronage politics and collusion requires stricter enforcement of conflict-of-interest rules, regular audits of public projects, and penalties for nepotism and favoritism, while empowering local governments and communities to demand accountability. Additionally, public education campaigns should aim to shift the perception of corruption as a “normal part of politics” by highlighting its long-term consequences, the importance of ethical leadership, and the role of citizens in fostering a culture of integrity and transparency.

4. **Leverage Civil Society and Media as Accountability Partners.** Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media enjoy higher trust ratings compared to government entities. Policymakers should actively engage these groups in anti-corruption efforts, such as monitoring public projects, conducting independent audits, and disseminating information about reforms. Collaborative partnerships can amplify the impact of government initiatives and ensure broader public participation.

5. **Increase Public Awareness and Education on Corruption.** The perception of corruption as a “normal part of politics” among 59% of Filipinos highlights the need for public education campaigns. These campaigns should focus on the long-term consequences of corruption, the importance of ethical leadership, and the role of citizens in demanding accountability. Awareness programs can shift public attitudes and encourage active participation in anti-corruption efforts.

6. To sustain anti-corruption reforms, the Philippines must integrate adaptive governance principles with inclusive governance strategies that address public priorities. Adaptive governance ensures flexibility and responsiveness by learning from past experiences, engaging diverse stakeholders, and refining policies based on feedback from citizens and CSOs. This approach allows for continuous improvement of initiatives like digital platforms and investigations, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness over time. Inclusive governance complements this by prioritizing transparency, fairness, and collaboration to tackle interconnected challenges such as poverty, inflation, and corruption. Policymakers should focus on reforms that resonate with the needs of all Filipinos, particularly marginalized groups, by ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. Together, adaptive and inclusive governance create a sustainable framework for combating corruption, fostering public trust, and driving equitable development that benefits all citizens.

By institutionalizing these recommendations, the Philippines can create a sustainable framework for combating corruption, fostering public trust, and ensuring that reforms endure beyond individual leadership.

The fight against corruption in the Philippines remains a complex and urgent challenge, deeply intertwined with systemic issues such as patronage politics, collusion, and institutional inefficiencies. While recent efforts under President Marcos Jr.'s administration, including lifestyle checks, digital platforms, and independent investigations, signal progress, public trust in government institutions remains fragile. The fluctuating trust ratings of key leaders, coupled with widespread skepticism toward agencies like the DPWH, underscore the need for sustained transparency, accountability, and institutional resilience. Addressing these challenges requires not only strong leadership but also inclusive governance that empowers citizens and ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Institutionalizing anti-corruption reforms is essential to breaking the cycle of corruption and fostering long-term progress. By codifying measures such as digital reporting platforms, independent oversight bodies, and stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws, the government can ensure that reforms are not dependent on political cycles or individual leadership. Engaging trusted entities like civil society organizations and the media as accountability partners further strengthens the fight against corruption, while adaptive governance principles ensure that reforms remain relevant and responsive to emerging challenges. These efforts must be complemented by public education campaigns to shift perceptions of corruption as a "normal part of politics" and encourage active citizen participation in demanding accountability.

Ultimately, the path to a corruption-resilient Philippines lies in inclusive and adaptive governance that prioritizes transparency, fairness, and collaboration. By addressing interconnected issues such as poverty, inflation, and corruption, the government can align its initiatives with the real needs of Filipinos, particularly marginalized communities. Sustaining these reforms requires persistence, trust-building, and a commitment to equitable development. With institutionalized measures and active public engagement, the Philippines can move closer to a future where corruption is the exception, not the norm, and where every Filipino has a fair chance to thrive.

## II. GUARDING THE WATERS: THE PHILIPPINES' STRATEGIC SHIFT FOR SOVEREIGNTY AND REGIONAL STABILITY

On July 28, 2025, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. delivered his fourth State of the Nation Address (SONA), a speech that reflected the growing complexities of governance in a nation grappling with both domestic discontent and external threats. Delivered in the aftermath of a bruising mid-term election, the SONA took a populist tone, focusing on bread-and-butter issues that resonate with ordinary Filipinos—runaway inflation, chronic power outages, and the deteriorating state of education. Yet, conspicuously absent from his address were references to the mounting geopolitical challenges that threaten the Philippines' sovereignty and survival.

As the nation faces intensifying tensions in the West Philippine Sea and the spectre of conflict over Taiwan, the Marcos administration has quietly adopted a bold and transformative defense strategy: The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC). This grand strategy, announced in January 2024, represents a paradigm shift in the Philippines' approach to national security, moving away from outdated coastal defense concepts to a robust framework designed to secure the country's vast archipelagic territory and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).



This article seeks to bridge the gap between the bread-and-butter issues highlighted in the 2025 SONA and the existential security threats confronting the Philippines. By examining the CADC's strategic objectives and its role in addressing China's maritime expansion and the potential Taiwan contingency, this analysis underscores the critical need for a cohesive approach to national survival—one that integrates domestic priorities with the imperatives of regional stability. In doing so, it aims to illuminate the path forward for a nation caught in the crosscurrents of internal challenges and external pressures.

## **The 2025 State of the Nation Address: Bread-and-Butter Issues and Security Omissions**

On July 28, 2025, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. stood before the Filipino people to deliver his fourth State of the Nation Address (SONA), a speech that bore the weight of a nation's growing frustrations. Delivered in Filipino, the address was a deliberate attempt to connect with ordinary citizens, many of whom have grown weary of the administration's inability to address pressing economic and social issues. He openly acknowledged the public's dissatisfaction with runaway inflation, the worsening state of education, chronic power outages, and the sluggish pace of infrastructure development. He sought to temper these grievances by highlighting modest economic gains, such as reduced inflation rates and increased job opportunities, while promising reforms in education through the ARAL or the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning Program (Republic Act No. 12028) and the establishment of Barangay Child Development Centers. These assurances, though populist in tone, seemed to fall short of addressing the deeper anxieties of a nation struggling to make ends meet.

Conspicuously absent from the President's address, however, were any substantive discussions of the geopolitical and national security challenges that loom large over the Philippines. The speech made no mention of the escalating tensions in the West Philippine Sea, the growing security cooperation with allies such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, or the administration's adoption of the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC). Even more glaring was the omission of the controversial decision to send former President Rodrigo Duterte to face trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the impending impeachment case against Vice President Sara Duterte. By sidestepping these critical issues, the President's SONA painted an incomplete picture of the state of the nation, one that prioritized immediate domestic concerns while leaving unaddressed the existential threats that could shape the Philippines' future in an increasingly volatile Indo-Pacific region.

However, during his speech at the Manila Strategy Forum last September 10, 2025, Pres. Marcos Jr. underscored the critical role of the Philippines-United States alliance in addressing these challenges. He emphasized that the alliance "serves the regional interest of upholding the rule of law and maintaining peace, security, and prosperity." This statement highlights the administration's reliance on international partnerships to counter China's aggressive actions and safeguard the nation's territorial integrity. While these issues were absent from the SONA, the Manila Strategy Forum speech reflects the administration's broader strategic approach to ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

## **The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC): A Strategic Shift**

In January 2024, the Marcos administration unveiled a bold and transformative defense strategy that signalled a decisive shift in the Philippines' approach to national security—the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC). This grand strategy, announced by Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro, represents a departure from the outdated, land-centric defense paradigm that focused on securing the country's long coastal areas. Instead, the CADC reorients the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) toward a modern, deterrence-based framework designed to protect the nation's vast archipelagic territory and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). By prioritizing anti-access and area denial capabilities, the CADC aims to prevent foreign militaries from operating within the Philippines' maritime domain, effectively transforming the country's waters into a no-go zone for adversarial forces such as China's maritime militia, Coast Guard, and Navy.

At its core, the CADC is a recognition of the existential threats posed by China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea and the potential flashpoint over Taiwan. It calls for the AFP to enhance its maritime domain awareness, connectivity, intelligence capabilities (C41STAR), and area denial systems in both marine and aerial domains. This strategic shift is not merely a defensive posture; it is a proactive effort to project Philippine military capabilities into its 200-nautical-mile EEZ, thereby bolstering the nation's diplomatic and strategic leverage. By adopting the CADC, the Marcos administration

has embraced a forward-looking defense policy that seeks to secure the Philippines' sovereignty, safeguard its natural resources, and fill the strategic vacuum in the southern flank of the first-island chain. In doing so, the CADC positions the Philippines as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific region's evolving security architecture, ensuring that the nation is prepared to confront the challenges of an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape.

## Geopolitical Context: The First-Island Chain and China's Maritime Expansion

The first-island chain, a strategic geopolitical corridor stretching from Japan's Ryukyu Islands to Taiwan and the Philippine archipelago, has emerged as a critical battleground in the Indo-Pacific's shifting power dynamics. For decades, this linear arrangement of island states has served as a natural barrier to China's maritime ambitions, effectively containing Beijing's naval forces within the confines of the Western Pacific. However, China's relentless maritime expansion has begun to challenge the integrity of this defensive line. Through a combination of naval build-up, coercive operations, and irredentist rhetoric, Beijing seeks to break past the first-island chain and project its growing comprehensive power into the open waters of the Western and Central Pacific. For the Philippines, this expansion is not merely a distant geopolitical concern—it is an existential threat that places the nation squarely in the crosshairs of China's strategic calculus.

From Beijing's perspective, the Philippines represents the weakest link in the first-island chain—a vulnerable and easily exploitable target in its quest for regional dominance. Chinese defense analysts have long dismissed the Philippines as a liability, a tail that drags down the strategic coherence of the island chain. Neutralizing the Philippines, they argue, is a necessary step toward achieving sea control over the South China Sea and advancing beyond the first-island chain. This view underscores the urgency for the Philippines to bolster its defensive posture and assert its sovereignty in the face of China's maritime expansion. The adoption of the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC) is a direct response to this geopolitical reality, enabling the Philippines to fill the strategic gap in the southern flank of the first-island chain and reaffirm its role as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific's evolving security architecture.

## Filling the Gap in the Southern Flank of the First-Island Chain

The southern flank of the first-island chain, anchored by the Philippine archipelago, has long been perceived as a strategic vulnerability in the Indo-Pacific's security architecture. For decades, this region has been overshadowed by the more militarized northern segments of the chain, such as Japan and Taiwan, leaving the Philippines as a critical yet underprepared link in the geopolitical corridor. China's maritime expansion has only magnified this vulnerability, as Beijing seeks to exploit the Philippines' perceived weaknesses to advance its irredentist ambitions in the South China Sea and beyond. By neutralizing the Philippines, China aims to fracture the first-island chain, undermine U.S. strategic influence, and establish unchallenged dominance over the region's vital sea lanes. This stark reality underscores the urgency for the Philippines to transform its defensive posture and assert its role as a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific's evolving balance of power.

The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC) is the Philippines' answer to this pressing challenge. By reconfiguring its military strategy around anti-access and area denial capabilities, the CADC seeks to fill the strategic gap in the southern flank of the first-island chain and deny adversarial forces the ability to operate freely within the nation's vast maritime domain. This shift is not merely about defending the Philippines' territorial integrity; it is about projecting strength and ensuring that the country's waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) remain secure from external coercion. Through enhanced maritime domain awareness, intelligence capabilities, and strategic partnerships with allies such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, the CADC positions the Philippines as a formidable bulwark against China's maritime expansion. In doing so, the Philippines not only safeguards its sovereignty but also reinforces the collective security of the first-island chain, ensuring that this critical geopolitical corridor remains a barrier to aggression and a cornerstone of stability in the Indo-Pacific.

## Ensuring National Survival and Regional Stability

In an era marked by intensifying great power competition and the erosion of established norms in the Indo-Pacific, the Philippines finds itself at a critical juncture. The nation's survival is no longer solely contingent on internal resilience but

also on its ability to navigate the turbulent waters of regional geopolitics. China's maritime expansion, coupled with its coercive tactics in the South China Sea, poses an existential threat to the Philippines' sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC) emerges as a bold and necessary response to this precarious environment. By shifting the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) from a land-centric defense posture to a maritime-oriented strategy, the CADC ensures that the Philippines is no longer a passive bystander but an active participant in shaping the region's security architecture. This strategic pivot is not merely about deterrence; it is about securing the nation's future and preserving the freedom of its people to reap the benefits of their maritime domain.

At the same time, the CADC underscores the Philippines' indispensable role in maintaining regional stability. As the southern anchor of the first-island chain, the Philippines is uniquely positioned to serve as both a shield and a bridge—deterring aggression while fostering cooperation among like-minded states. By enhancing its maritime domain awareness, strengthening its defense capabilities, and deepening its alliances with the United States, Japan, and Australia, the Philippines contributes to a collective security framework that counters China's revisionist ambitions. The CADC is not merely a national strategy; it is a statement of the Philippines' commitment to the broader Indo-Pacific order. In ensuring its own survival, the Philippines reinforces the stability of the region, demonstrating that even a middle power can play a decisive role in upholding the principles of sovereignty, freedom of navigation, and the rule of law in one of the world's most contested maritime spaces.

## Economic Security and Strategic Partnerships

To effectively address the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century, the Philippines must recognize the inextricable link between national security and economic security. While the CADC underscores the importance of safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, the nation's economic resilience—anchored in robust trade and investment partnerships—serves as an equally critical pillar of survival and stability. In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition, economic security is not merely a domestic concern but a strategic imperative that shapes the Philippines' ability to navigate global risks. The confluence of national security and economic security highlights the need for a cohesive approach, where strategic alliances not only deter aggression but also foster economic growth and resilience. This dual focus ensures that the Philippines remains a vital player in the Indo-Pacific, leveraging its partnerships to secure both its borders and its economic future.

Recent Pulse Asia Research, Inc. surveys reveal the Philippines' strong reliance on established trade and investment partners to ensure stability amid global risks. The United States leads as the most important partner for economic security (77%), reflecting its significant role in trade, investments, and economic cooperation. This highlights the Philippines' dependence on the U.S. for economic growth and resilience.

Japan (44%) and ASEAN (29%) follow as key partners, showcasing the importance of regional trade and investment ties. Japan's role as a major investor and trading partner aligns with its recognition in the survey, while ASEAN reflects the Philippines' integration into regional economic frameworks and intra-Asian trade.

Australia (26%) and Canada (23%) are also identified as important partners, emphasizing the Philippines' engagement with Western economies for trade and investment opportunities. South Korea (17%) and the European Union (14%) further highlight the country's diversified approach to fostering economic partnerships with both regional and global players.

These insights manifest the Philippines' strategic focus on maintaining strong economic relationships with countries that can provide investment, trade opportunities, and economic security amid global uncertainties. The data underscores the importance of balancing regional and global partnerships to sustain economic growth and resilience.

On the geopolitical aspect, the survey results highlight the Philippines' strategic alignment with key global partners amid rising tensions in the West Philippine Sea and Indo-Pacific. These insights manifest the Philippines' prioritization of partnerships with nations that share democratic values and have vested interests in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The data also highlights the country's strategic pivot towards allies that can provide economic and security assurances amid global risks and regional tensions.



**Table 6**  
Countries or Organizations that are the Philippines' Most Important Partners for  
Economic Security Amid Global Risks: **PHILIPPINES**  
In Percent, Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed  
(September 27–30, 2025)



PulseAsia  
RESEARCH INC

Base: Total Interviews, 100%								
Which of the following countries or organizations are the Philippines' most important partners for economic security amid global risks? You may choose up to three	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
United States	77	85	86	79	53	82	80	55
Japan	44	51	52	29	36	51	44	34
ASEAN	29	23	27	27	37	31	29	29
Australia	26	26	24	29	28	17	25	47
Great Britain/UK	24	17	25	25	25	13	26	28
Canada	23	27	19	31	24	13	23	40
South Korea	17	21	22	13	10	28	15	18
European Union (EU)	14	15	15	12	14	17	13	14
China	6	4	5	4	12	4	7	5
India	2	3	2	7	1	2	2	4
Others	0.02	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
France	0.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russia	0.01	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cannot say/None	0.02	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Cannot say	0.01	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
None	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

## On the West Philippine Sea

The Pulse Asia survey underscores the Philippines' reliance on international allies to address Chinese coercion and aggression in the West Philippine Sea, with the United States emerging as the most trusted partner at 77%. This overwhelming preference reflects the historical ties and defense agreements between the two nations, such as the Mutual Defense Treaty, which Filipinos view as a safeguard for the country's sovereignty. Japan, Australia, and Canada also ranked highly, indicating the Philippines' inclination to seek support from nations that have consistently upheld international law and freedom of navigation in the region. However, the survey also highlights the need for the Philippines to strengthen its own capabilities to assert sovereignty and protect its territorial waters, rather than relying solely on foreign powers. While international partnerships are crucial, a nationalist perspective would emphasize the importance of self-reliance and the development of a robust defense strategy to ensure the country's territorial integrity.

The survey results also reveal the varying perceptions of foreign allies across different regions and socioeconomic classes, which could reflect the diverse experiences and priorities of Filipinos. For instance, while the United States is widely trusted, its lower support among Class E (65%) compared to Class ABC (79%) may suggest concerns about over-reliance on foreign powers among economically disadvantaged groups. Similarly, the minimal support for countries like Russia and India highlights the need for the Philippines to carefully evaluate its alliances and prioritize partnerships that align with its national interests.

These results should serve also as a call to action for the government to invest in strengthening its own maritime defense capabilities and assert its rights in the West Philippine Sea. By doing so, the Philippines can reduce its dependence on external actors and take a more proactive role in safeguarding its territorial waters and national dignity.

**Table 7**  
**Countries that Can Best Assist the Philippines in Addressing**  
**Chinese Coercion and Aggression in the West Philippine Sea: PHILIPPINES**  
 In Percent, Multiple Response, Up to 3 Allowed  
 (September 27–30, 2025)



PulseAsia  
RESEARCH INC

Base: Total Interviews, 100%								
Which country do you think can BEST assist the Philippines in addressing Chinese coercion and aggression in the West Philippine Sea? You may give up to three responses. You may also mention others not in the list.	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
United States	77	82	81	77	65	79	78	65
Japan	45	53	55	25	38	50	44	46
Australia	30	24	32	26	33	24	33	25
Canada	29	30	24	47	25	30	28	37
Great Britain/UK	25	23	25	22	27	23	26	18
South Korea	22	20	30	17	13	23	22	26
Germany	17	13	16	21	17	13	17	21
France	10	9	8	11	12	7	9	18
India	3	4	3	5	0	0	3	3
Others	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russia	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unaided	2	0	0	4	4	1	2	0
Can't say	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	0
None	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0

The CADC represents a transformative shift in the Philippines' approach to national security, addressing the evolving challenges in the Indo-Pacific and the existential threats posed by China's maritime expansion. By adopting a maritime-centric defense posture, the Philippines is asserting its sovereignty, securing its vast maritime domain, and reinforcing its role as a key player in the region's geopolitical landscape. The CADC not only strengthens the nation's defenses but also positions the Philippines as a vital anchor in the southern flank of the first-island chain, contributing to collective security and regional stability. The Pulse Asia survey further underscores the importance of international partnerships, with the United States, Japan, and Australia identified as key allies in countering Chinese aggression in the West Philippine Sea. However, the survey also highlights the need for the Philippines to calibrate its reliance on foreign powers by investing in its own maritime defense capabilities and fostering a nationalist perspective on sovereignty. By integrating national security with economic resilience and leveraging strategic partnerships, the Philippines can ensure its survival, safeguard its territorial integrity, and shape the Indo-Pacific as a region of stability, cooperation, and shared prosperity.

### III. LEGISLATIVE UPDATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter of 2025, seven bills identified as priorities by the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) were signed or lapsed into law. These are the Government Optimization Act (12231), Open Access in Data Transmission Act (12234), Amendments to the Foreign Investors' Long-Term Lease Act (RA 12252), Rationalization of the Mining Fiscal Regime (12253), E-Government Act (Republic Act 12254), Virology Institute of the Philippines Act (RA 12289), and Accelerated and Reformed Right-of-Way (ARROW) Act (RA 12290).

### 1. Government Optimization Act

The new law seeks to reevaluate, streamline, and modernize the structure of the Executive Branch to lead to a more efficient public service delivery. It sets forth the powers, responsibilities, and composition of the committee that will propose the actual Government Optimization Program Management Plan.

### 2. Konektadong Pinoy (Open-Access to Data Transmission) Act

The law intends to lower the barriers for the entry of telecommunications companies intending to render data transmission services in the Philippines. With this legislation, internet coverage in the country is expected to expand and improve through the easing of requirements for the establishment of more telecommunication towers and data transmission facilities.

### 3. Amendment to the Foreign Investors' Long-Term Lease Act

The act contributes to the enabling investment environment by increasing the period foreign investors are allowed to lease private lands from 50 years, renewable for not more than 25 years, to 99 years. The bill also allows the sublease of properties, prohibits collateral attacks on the validity of the lease contract, and the leasehold rights may now be used as a collateral for a loan.

### 4. Enhanced Fiscal Regime for Large-Scale Mining Act

The Mining Fiscal Regime Act aims to codify and simplify the administration of taxes in the mining sector as well as adjust the tax rate to make the industry more competitive. Said bill is in step with the Marcos Jr. administration's desire to revitalize the mining sector to support the country's economic growth. Under the proposed revised fiscal regime, a tiered and margin-based royalty from mining operations outside of mineral reservations will be imposed. This proposal makes it simpler for investors and the BIR to compute the corresponding tax rates.

### 5. E-Government Act

The E-Government Act (AC: Let's be consistent. What is the more correct term?) seeks to establish a digitally empowered, integrated, and secure government system, enabling responsive and transparent online services. By leveraging technology, the law ensures real-time access to information, reduces red tape human, and minimizes opportunities for corruption. Through the E-Governance Act, the Philippines is seen to move toward a more open, responsive, and citizen-centric government, strengthening public trust and participation in governance.

### 6. Virology and Vaccine Institute of the Philippines Act

The law establishes a virology and vaccine institute to lead the research on and develop cures against pathogens and potential disease-causing agents of humans, animals, and plants. A Virology Research Fund will also be created.

### 7. Accelerated and Reformed Right-of-Way Act

Right-of-Way Acquisition is one of the main bottlenecks of the national government's infrastructure program. The law will introduce reforms that will recognize the role of private entities in land acquisition and expropriation, lower the deposit cost in expropriation proceedings, and provide default basis for valuation in the absence of land classification.

On September 30, 2025, the LEDAC met and agreed to prioritize and adopt 44 priority legislations for the 20th Congress. Among the identified pieces of legislation are the Universal Health Care Act, Blue Economy bill, Department of Water Resources bill, and Waste-to-Energy bill, which were part of the identified priorities for the 19th Congress. Below are the LEDAC priorities.

1. Amendments to the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act
2. Amendments to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Act
3. Department of Water Resources (DWR) Bill
4. Waste-to-Energy Bill
5. Electric Power Industry Reform Act Amendments: Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) Strengthening Bill
6. National Land Use Act
7. Excise Tax on Single-use Plastics
8. Blue Economy Act
9. Amendments to the Bank Deposits Secrecy Law (subject to further consideration of foreign currency deposits secrecy)
10. Progressive Budgeting for Better and Modernized Governance Act



- 
11. Right to Information Act
  12. Amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering Act
  13. Philippine Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Act
  14. Amendments to the Universal Health Care (UHC) Act
  15. National Center for Geriatric Health
  16. Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) Act
  17. Amendments to the Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pilipino Act
  18. Amendments to the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education Act
  19. Amendments to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act
  20. Amendments to the Teachers Professionalization Act
  21. Amendments to the Local Government Code (Comprehensive)
  22. General Tax Amnesty
  23. Extension of Estate Tax Amnesty
  24. Amendments to the Fisheries Code
  25. Amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law or Rice Industry and Consumer Empowerment (RICE) Act, including minor amendments to the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act (Comprehensive)
  26. Amendments to the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Law
  27. Amendments to the Biofuels Act
  28. Cybersecurity Act
  29. Amendments to the National Building Code
  30. Amendments to the Magna Carta for SMEs
  31. National Reintegration Bill
  32. Reprogramming of Seal of Good Local Governance
  33. Digital Payments Act
  34. Masterplan for Infrastructure and National Development Act (proposed by Senate)
  35. Classroom-Building Acceleration Program Act (proposed by Senate)
  36. Requiring Civil Servants to Waive Bank Secrecy (proposed by Senate)
  37. Law on Online Gambling (proposed by Senate)
  38. Disaster Risk Financing Insurance (proposed by House of Representatives)
  39. Strengthening the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (proposed by House of Representatives)
  40. Presidential Merit Scholarship Program (proposed by House of Representatives)
  41. Disqualifying Relatives of Officials (4th degree) in Government Contracts (proposed by House of Representatives)
  42. Fair Use of Social Media, AI, and Internet Technology in Elections (proposed by House of Representatives)
  43. Modernizing the Bureau of Immigration (proposed by House of Representatives)
  44. Magna Carta for Barangays (proposed by House of Representatives)

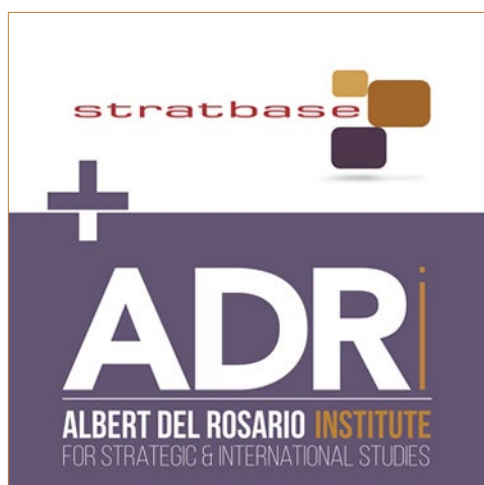
For the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Senate will be led by Senate President Vicente Sotto III, Senate President Pro-Tempore Panfilo Lacson, and Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri with Sen. Francis Escudero as Senate Minority Floor Leader. Meanwhile, the House of Representatives will be under the helm of Speaker Faustino “Bojie” Dy III and Majority Floor Leader Ferdinand Alexander “Sandro” Marcos, with Rep. Marcelino Libanan as House Minority Floor Leader.

The First Regular Session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Philippines commenced last July 28, 2025, and ran until October 10, 2025. The first adjournment took place last October 11, 2025 and will end on November 9, 2025.



# 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

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