

POLÍTIKA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY

4TH QUARTER

Steering the Winds of Change: Balancing Reform and Governance Challenges in the Marcos Jr. Administration

The Marcos Jr. Administration adopts a reform-driven approach, however, persistent risks of corruption and inefficiencies threaten progress, underscoring the need for vigilance to ensure sustainable national development

Charting Stability through a Multi-Domain Approach to Regional Security

Amid intensified Chinese coercion in the West Philippine Sea, the Marcos Jr. Administration strengthens multi-domain defense capabilities and deepens partnerships with allies, ahead of the Philippines' ASEAN chairship in 2026

Legislative Developments and Update

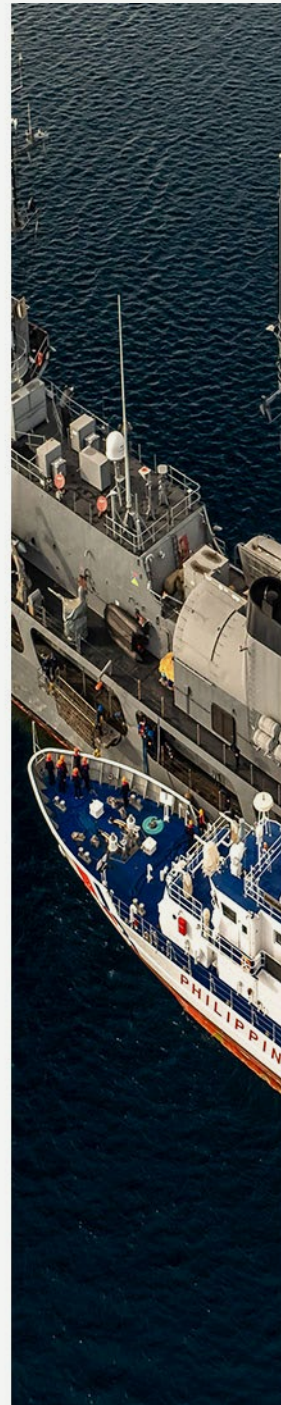
The Marcos Jr. Administration advanced 13 priority bills in late 2025, aiming to enhance transparency, accountability, and equitable governance

CONTENTS



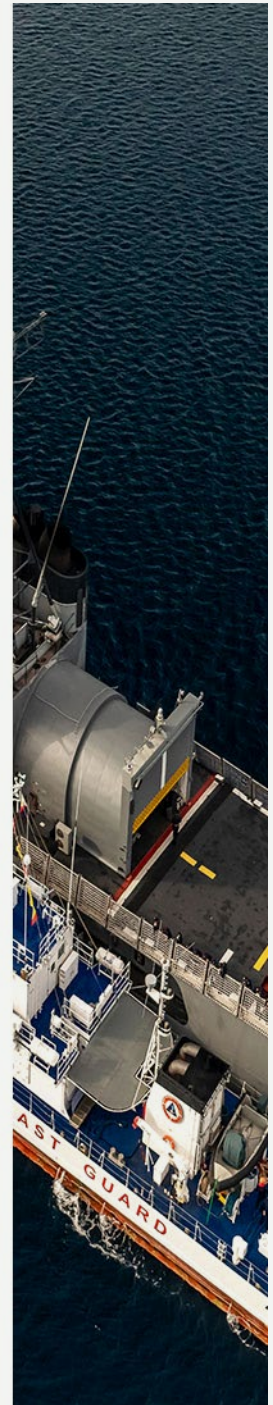
Steering the
Winds of Change:
Balancing Reform
and Governance
Challenges in the
Marcos Jr.
Administration

p.4



Charting
Stability through
a Multi-Domain
Approach to
Regional Security
the Ground

p.15




Legislative
Updates and
Developments

p.19

ON THE COVER & CONTENTS

Credits to the following contributors:
Prof. Victor Andres “Dindo” Manhit,
Jaime Jimenez, Ph.D., Bones
Palanca, and Linar-Mae Orbista

Picture credits to the following, cover page,
contents page, page 3, page 7 and page 12:
AdobeStock_1764602669;
AdobeStock_464808296_Editorial
Use_Only; AdobeStock_509769307;
AdobeStock_1609110440 and
AdobeStock_353547936_Editorial_Use_Only



CORRUPTION

OVERVIEW

The Fourth Quarter 2025 issue of *Politika*, titled “Winds of Change: Steering the Nation Through Transparency, Security, and Development,” examines the Marcos Jr. administration’s governance, highlighting its reform-driven initiatives and the challenges it faces in achieving sustainable national development.

The administration has prioritized transparency and accountability, introducing key legislative measures such as the Anti-Dynasty Bill, the Citizens Access and Disclosure of Expenditures for National Accountability Act, Independent People’s Commission Act, and Party-list System Reform Act. These reforms aim to combat corruption, promote equitable governance, and rebuild public trust. However, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, as surveys reveal widespread public dissatisfaction and skepticism about government accountability.

Economic resilience and development remain central to the administration’s agenda, with policies focused on stabilizing prices, supporting local industries, and transitioning the Philippines to upper middle-income status. Infrastructure modernization projects, including transportation upgrades and water systems, are designed to boost connectivity and competitiveness. Yet, risks of corruption and inefficiencies in implementation threaten to undermine these efforts.

Maritime security and sovereignty are key priorities, with the administration taking assertive steps to protect the West Philippine Sea amidst intensified Chinese coercion. Strengthened defense partnerships with allies like the U.S., Japan, and Canada, alongside the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept, aim to safeguard territorial integrity and uphold the rules-based international order.

The administration is also advancing digital transformation and cybersecurity reforms to modernize governance and improve public service delivery. Sustainability and renewable energy initiatives, such as solar power projects and energy storage systems, reflect a commitment to environmental security and equitable access to resources.

As the Philippines prepares to chair ASEAN in 2026, the administration is focusing on regional leadership, international cooperation, and multilateral defense partnerships to address geopolitical challenges and foster stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Legislative developments, including reforms targeting political dynasties and the party-list system, aim to address systemic challenges and promote equitable governance. Despite challenges, the Marcos Jr. administration’s focus on transparency, security, and development lays the foundation for sustainable national progress and regional leadership.

While the First Regular Session of the Twentieth Congress is currently under adjournment, the Resumption of Session is set on January 26, 2026, and will continue until March 20, 2026.

I. STEERING THE WINDS OF CHANGE: BALANCING REFORM AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES IN THE MARCOS JR. ADMINISTRATION

On the one hand, the governance of the Marcos Jr. administration for the fourth quarter of 2025 reflects a proactive and reform-oriented approach to addressing national challenges. This approach is primarily evident in its focus on transparency, economic stability, infrastructure modernization, maritime security, social welfare, international cooperation, and digital transformation. These are complemented by the emphasis on the aspects of military professionalism and integrity and sustainability and renewable energy.

On the other hand, the administration must remain cautious of persistent risks posed by bad governance, which can lead to inefficiencies, corruption, and ultimately poor public services. Such issues not only undermine the effectiveness of reforms but also erode public trust, hinder progress, and exacerbate social inequities. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that the administration's initiatives achieve their intended impact and contribute to sustainable national development.

What follows is a more nuanced discussion of governance reforms and actions in the last three months of 2025, coupled by a reminder of the need to recognize and capture the opportunities that challenges bring along.

Transparency and Accountability

The Marcos Jr. administration has made notable strides in promoting transparency and accountability, with initiatives such as livestreaming budget deliberations and addressing corruption scandals. Legislative reforms, including the Anti-Dynasty Bill, the Independent People's Commission Bill, the Party-list System Reform Bill, and the Citizens Access and Disclosure of Expenditures for National Accountability (CADENA) Bill signaled a positive step toward strengthening democratic governance. These efforts reflect a promising direction toward rebuilding public trust and fostering a culture of open governance.

However, the administration must remain vigilant in addressing the risks of bad governance that could undermine these initiatives. Public dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, as highlighted by survey results, indicates the need for stronger enforcement and institutional safeguards. The suspension of livestreams during budget deliberations has raised concerns about the consistency of transparency efforts. To ensure lasting progress, the government must prioritize the institutionalization of reforms and establish mechanisms to prevent future corruption, ensuring that public trust is not eroded further.

Building on the administration's efforts to promote transparency and accountability, it is essential to examine public sentiment toward the leadership, as reflected in the performance and trust ratings of the president and vice-president.

Trust Ratings of the President

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s performance and trust ratings from the December 2025 Pulse Asia survey reflect a mixed but stable public sentiment. While the President's approval rating stands at 34%, with 18% undecided, his disapproval rating is at 48%. This indicates that while nearly half of Filipino adults are critical of his performance, a significant portion of the population appreciates his efforts, particularly in Luzon, where he received a majority approval rating of 51%. His trust rating is at 32%, with 21% undecided, showing that a notable segment of the population continues to place confidence in his leadership. Despite challenges, the President's ratings have remained relatively consistent since September 2025, demonstrating resilience in public opinion amidst various national issues.

From July 2024 to November 2025, Pres. Marcos Jr.'s trust ratings in the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey demonstrated consistently high public awareness and stable trust levels. Nationally, his awareness remained at 99-100%,

while his “Much Trust” ratings ranged between 47% and 54%. Regionally, his trust ratings varied significantly, as Balance Luzon showed consistently higher trust levels, peaking at +55 in July 2024 and ending at +18 in November 2025. The Visayas displayed stability, while Mindanao experienced the most notable fluctuations. These trends highlight Marcos Jr.’s strong visibility and trust nationally, with regional variations in public perception.

Comparatively, in the December 2025 Pulse Asia survey, Pres. Marcos Jr.’s trust rating stood at 32%, with 21% undecided, reflecting mixed public sentiment. In contrast, the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey from July 2024 to November 2025 showed consistently higher “Much Trust” ratings.

To improve his performance and trust ratings, Pres. Marcos Jr. could consider the following actionable recommendations:

1. **Prioritize Addressing the Affordability of Goods and Economic Concerns:** With inflation identified as the most urgent national concern by 59% of Filipinos, the President could focus on implementing policies that stabilize prices and reduce the cost of living. This could include measures to support local industries, ensure food security, and provide targeted subsidies to vulnerable sectors. Clear communication about these efforts would help build public trust and demonstrate his commitment to addressing the nation’s most pressing issues.

2. **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Initiatives and Accountability Mechanisms:** Fighting corruption remains a critical concern for 48% of Filipinos, as highlighted in recent surveys. To address this, President Marcos Jr. could enhance transparency and accountability in government transactions by supporting independent investigations, implementing stricter anti-corruption measures, and ensuring public officials are held accountable for misconduct. Certifying anti-corruption bills, such as the Anti-Dynasty Bill, CADENA Act, Independent People’s Commission Act, and Party-list System Reform Act, as urgent and actively promoting their passage could further bolster public confidence in his leadership. Additionally, establishing robust accountability mechanisms, such as the proposed Independent People’s Commission, would ensure impartial investigations into irregularities in government projects and deter corruption. Institutionalizing reforms like the CADENA Act, which mandates a centralized Digital Budget Portal for public access to government expenditures, would further strengthen fiscal transparency and responsible governance. These measures are essential to restoring public trust and ensuring the administration’s initiatives achieve their intended impact.

3. **Engage in Proactive Communication and Public Outreach:** To address the 21% of Filipinos who remain undecided about trusting him, the President could increase his visibility and direct engagement with the public. Regularly updating citizens on government initiatives, hosting town hall meetings, and leveraging social media platforms to communicate achievements and plans could help bridge the gap and foster trust. Transparency and accessibility are key to building stronger connections with the public.

Trust Ratings of the Vice-president

Vice President Sara Duterte continues to enjoy strong public support, as reflected in the December 2025 Pulse Asia survey. Her performance approval rating stands at an impressive 56%, with only 24% disapproval and 20% undecided. This indicates that a majority of Filipinos appreciate her efforts in fulfilling her duties, particularly in Mindanao, where her approval rating reaches an overwhelming 95%. Similarly, her trust rating is notably high at 54%, with only 24% expressing distrust and 22% undecided.

From July 2024 to November 2025, Sara Duterte’s trust ratings in the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey revealed high awareness but fluctuating public confidence. Nationally, her awareness remained at 98-100%, while her “Much Trust” ratings declined from 65% in July 2024 to 56% in November 2025.

While the performance and trust ratings of the President and Vice President reflect public sentiment toward their leadership, these ratings are closely tied to the administration’s ability to address critical issues, including the pervasive concerns about corruption and the demand for greater accountability in governance.

Perception of Corruption and Demanding Accountability

Looking into the specific issue of corruption, highlighting public concerns about its prevalence and the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures manifest the public's call for justice and accountability, including support for stricter penalties, legal actions, and transparency measures.

The results of the recent SWS survey in October 2025, commissioned by the Stratbase Institute, reveal that corruption is perceived as a significant issue at the highest levels of government. 83% of respondents identified the national government as the most corrupt level of governance, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with leadership at the top. Furthermore, 73% of respondents in Mega Manila believe corruption is most prevalent among high-ranking officials, such as cabinet members and other top-level management. This perception highlights the public's concern that corruption is deeply entrenched among those in positions of power, undermining trust in the government's ability to lead with integrity. The findings emphasize the urgent need for reforms and accountability measures targeting the highest levels of government to restore public confidence.

The growing dissatisfaction with governance is also warranted due to the perceived increase in corruption, where 77% of respondents in Mega Manila and 80% in NCR felt that corruption had become more widespread compared to three years ago. This sentiment reflects a significant decline in public trust in the government's ability to address corruption effectively. Additionally, 60% of respondents believe that the current administration's efforts to combat corruption are not effective, further highlighting the public's frustration with the lack of progress in tackling this issue. These findings underscore the urgent need for stronger anti-corruption measures and more transparent governance to address the public's concerns and restore confidence in the government.

Moreover, the survey results demonstrate a strong public demand for justice and accountability in addressing corruption where 74% of respondents in Mega Manila expressed support for imposing stiffer penalties on corrupt government officials, while 71% favored filing cases against corrupt officials or personnel. These findings highlight the public's desire for decisive action against corruption and their belief that stricter enforcement and legal consequences are essential to curbing unethical practices. Additionally, respondents supported measures such as monitoring officials' lifestyles and requiring public officials to disclose their assets and liabilities. The results reflect a clear call for accountability and justice, emphasizing the need for robust anti-corruption policies and enforcement to restore public trust in governance.

Lastly, the survey results reveal a strong public demand for transparency and accountability in governance, where 71% of respondents in Mega Manila believed that public movements, such as the Trillion Peso March, could compel the government to address corruption. More so, 63% supported making Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALNs) of government officials accessible, while 59% favored the passage of the Freedom of Information Act to enhance transparency. These findings underscore the public's desire for greater access to information and mechanisms that empower citizens to hold officials accountable. The results highlight the importance of implementing measures that promote openness in government procedures, systems, and services, as well as fostering citizen participation in the fight against corruption.

Building on the public's strong demand for justice and accountability, it is crucial to examine the widespread perception of corruption within the government and its impact on public trust and governance.

On the Prevalence of Corruption in Government

The Pulse Asia Research, Inc. survey in December 2025 on the "Prevalence of Corruption in Government" paints a clear picture: most Filipinos believe corruption is widespread in the country. A striking 94% of respondents said corruption is prevalent, with 71% describing it as "very widespread." This shows that people are deeply aware of the issue and see it as a major problem affecting governance and public trust.

Interestingly, while the majority still see corruption as rampant, there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of people who believe it is "very widespread" compared to previous surveys. This could mean that some people are starting to see signs of improvement or are becoming more hopeful about efforts to address corruption.

On the other hand, 24% of respondents said corruption has "stayed the same," and 5% said they "cannot say if it is

widespread or not.” This suggests that while many are vocal about the issue, there are still some who are unsure or feel that the situation hasn’t changed much.

The survey also highlights regional and class differences. For example, respondents in Mindanao and those in the lower-income class (E) were more likely to perceive corruption as widespread. This could reflect their direct experiences with governance or their exposure to the impacts of corruption in their communities.

Overall, the widespread perception of corruption, especially among lower-income groups and certain regions, highlights the urgent need for political leaders to prioritize anti-corruption measures and rebuild trust in government institutions to address the growing dissatisfaction and inequality.

While the perception of widespread corruption highlights deep-rooted governance challenges, public confidence in the likelihood of holding officials accountable for specific irregularities, such as those in flood control projects, reveals a complex mix of hope, skepticism, and uncertainty.

On the Likelihood of Punishment for Government Officials Found Responsible for Irregularities in Flood Control Projects

The survey results on the likelihood of punishment for government officials involved in irregularities in flood control projects reveal a mix of hope, uncertainty, and skepticism among Filipinos. While 59% of respondents believe that officials will be punished, this figure has dropped significantly from 71% in September 2025. This decline suggests that public confidence in the justice system and government accountability mechanisms is weakening. The belief that officials will be punished is strongest in Mindanao (65%) and among Class ABC respondents (68%), likely reflecting optimism in regions and social groups that may have greater access to resources or a closer connection to government institutions. However, in NCR, only 42% of respondents believe officials will be held accountable, which may reflect heightened exposure to political controversies and a more critical view of government performance.



Uncertainty about the likelihood of punishment has risen to 28%, up from 21% in September. This growing uncertainty indicates that many Filipinos are unsure whether the justice system can effectively address corruption. This sentiment is most pronounced in NCR (37%) and Balance Luzon (28%), where political issues are often more visible. On the other hand, Mindanao respondents are the least uncertain, with only 25% expressing doubt. Among social classes, Class D respondents showed the highest level of uncertainty (30%), while Class E respondents were the least uncertain (19%).

Skepticism about punishment has also increased, with 13% of respondents believing that officials will not be punished, compared to 8% in September. This growing disillusionment is most evident in NCR, where 21% of respondents expressed this view. Class E respondents also showed significant skepticism, with 23% believing that officials will escape punishment. These findings highlight a growing sense of frustration and distrust in the government's ability to address corruption effectively.

These results highlight the need for urgent reforms to restore public trust in the justice system and government institutions. While the majority of Filipinos still believe in the possibility of punishment, the declining confidence and rising skepticism suggest that the government must take concrete steps to demonstrate its commitment to transparency and accountability. This includes ensuring swift and fair investigations, holding officials accountable, and addressing systemic issues that allow corruption to persist. The resilience of hope among many Filipinos can serve as a foundation for collective action and advocacy to demand better governance and justice.

As public confidence in the punishment of corrupt officials continues to waver, it is essential to explore the factors that Filipinos believe most influence court decisions in corruption cases.

On the Biggest Factor Affecting Court Decisions in Corruption Cases

The survey results reveal that Filipinos believe the justice system is heavily influenced by external factors, particularly the power and influence of government officials. Over half of the respondents (51%) identified the use of influence by government officials to avoid conviction as the most significant factor affecting court decisions in corruption cases. This finding reflects a widespread perception that the justice system is vulnerable to manipulation by those in positions of power, allowing them to escape accountability. This sentiment is particularly strong among Class D respondents (54%), who may feel the effects of corruption more directly in their daily lives, such as through reduced access to public services or resources. On the other hand, Class E respondents (26%) were less likely to cite influence as the primary factor, possibly indicating a sense of resignation or limited awareness of judicial processes.

The quality of evidence was the second most cited factor, with 25% of respondents emphasizing its importance. This suggests that many Filipinos believe that strong, credible evidence is essential to secure convictions in corruption cases. Interestingly, Class E respondents (52%) were more likely to prioritize evidence, which may reflect their hope that concrete proof can overcome the influence of powerful individuals. This finding highlights the need for robust investigative processes and the protection of evidence to ensure fair trials.

The length of trials was identified by 16% of respondents as a significant factor. Prolonged legal proceedings can lead to public frustration and create opportunities for corruption and manipulation. This concern was most pronounced in NCR (22%), where people are likely more aware of high-profile cases that have been delayed for years. Among social classes, Class ABC respondents (20%) expressed the most concern about trial length, likely due to their greater exposure to the complexities of legal processes.

Fairness on the part of judges was cited by 8% of respondents as the biggest factor affecting court decisions. While fairness is undoubtedly important, the relatively low percentage suggests that many Filipinos believe systemic issues, such as influence and evidence, overshadow the role of individual judges. However, Class E respondents (12%) were more likely to emphasize fairness, possibly reflecting their desire for impartiality in a system they perceive as favoring the powerful.

These results highlight the urgent need for reforms to address the systemic issues that undermine the justice system's credibility. The government must prioritize measures to ensure transparency, impartiality, and efficiency in judicial processes. This includes protecting whistleblowers, improving evidence-gathering mechanisms, and ensuring the independence of the

judiciary. The survey results also underscore the importance of empowering citizens to demand accountability and advocate for reforms that promote justice and fairness. The resilience of public hope in the justice system, despite its challenges, can serve as a foundation for collective action to demand better governance and judicial integrity.

While systemic issues in the justice system remain a significant concern, public support for banning political dynasties highlights a growing demand for equitable governance and reduced concentration of power within families.

On Public Support to Banning Political Dynasties

The December 2025 Pulse Asia Research survey revealed that a small majority of Filipino adults (54%) agree with the immediate passage of a law banning political dynasties. Among those who agree, 21% expressed strong agreement, while 33% somewhat agreed. Meanwhile, 27% of respondents were undecided, and 18% disagreed, with 13% somewhat disagreeing and 5% strongly disagreeing. These results highlight a general inclination toward supporting the proposed law, although a significant portion of the population remains uncertain.

When analyzed by location, Metro Manila showed the highest level of agreement, with 69% of respondents supporting the immediate passage of the law. Of these, 46% somewhat agreed, and 22% strongly agreed. Only 11% of Metro Manila respondents disagreed, while 20% were undecided. Similarly, respondents from the rest of Luzon and the Visayas also showed strong support, with 59% agreeing in both regions. In Luzon, 27% strongly agreed, while 31% somewhat agreed, and 26% were undecided. In the Visayas, 24% strongly agreed, 34% somewhat agreed, and 23% were undecided. In contrast, Mindanao showed a more divided opinion, with only 34% agreeing (5% strongly and 29% somewhat), while 38% were undecided, and 27% disagreed (17% somewhat and 10% strongly).

The survey further revealed differences in opinion across socioeconomic classes. Class D respondents showed the highest level of agreement, with 57% supporting the immediate passage of the law (22% strongly and 35% somewhat). Class E followed with 47% agreement (17% strongly and 30% somewhat), while Class C had the lowest agreement at 43% (16% strongly and 28% somewhat). Notably, indecision was most pronounced among Class C respondents (37%), followed by Class E (34%) and Class D (25%). Disagreement was highest among Class C respondents (20%), compared to 18% in Class D and 19% in Class E.

Table 1
AGREEMENT / DISAGREEMENT WITH TEST STATEMENT:
“Congress should immediately pass a law banning political dynasties.”
In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
(December 12 - 15, 2025)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

	In Percent						
	AGREE	VERY MUCH AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	CANNOT SAY	DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	VERY MUCH DISAGREE
National (RP)	54	21	33	27	18	13	5
Metro Manila (NCR)	69	22	46	20	11	7	5
Balance Luzon (BL)	59	27	31	26	15	12	3
Visayas (VIS)	59	24	34	23	18	15	3
Mindanao (MIN)	34	5	29	38	27	17	10
Class C	43	16	28	37	20	18	2
Class D	57	22	35	25	18	12	6
Class E	47	17	30	34	19	16	4

Extending the call for equitable governance, public sentiment also strongly favors the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Infrastructure Corruption to ensure transparency and accountability in government projects.

On Public Support to Creating the Independent Commission Against Infrastructure Corruption

In the same survey, a slight majority of Filipino adults (52%) expressed agreement with the immediate passage of a law to create a fully empowered Independent Commission Against Infrastructure Corruption (ICAIC). Among those who agree, 15% strongly agreed, while 37% somewhat agreed. Meanwhile, 33% of respondents were undecided, and 15% disagreed, with 12% somewhat disagreeing and 3% strongly disagreeing. These results indicate that while there is general support for the creation of the ICAIC, a significant portion of the population remains ambivalent about the matter.

When analyzed by location, Metro Manila showed the highest level of agreement, with 67% of respondents supporting the immediate passage of the law. Of these, 50% somewhat agreed, and 17% strongly agreed. Only 9% of Metro Manila respondents disagreed, while 24% were undecided. The Visayas also showed strong support, with 61% agreeing (20% strongly and 41% somewhat), while 31% were undecided, and only 9% disagreed. The rest of Luzon showed 52% agreement (17% strongly and 35% somewhat), with 32% undecided and 15% disagreeing. Mindanao showed a more divided opinion, with 35% agreeing (4% strongly and 31% somewhat), 40% expressing indecision, and 24% disagreeing (14% somewhat and 10% strongly).

The survey also revealed differences in opinion across socioeconomic classes. Class D respondents showed the highest level of agreement, with 54% supporting the immediate passage of the law (16% strongly and 38% somewhat). Class E followed with 51% agreement (17% strongly and 34% somewhat), while Class C had the lowest agreement at 40% (7% strongly and 34% somewhat). Indecision was most pronounced among Class C respondents (41%), followed by Class E

Table 2
AGREEMENT / DISAGREEMENT WITH TEST STATEMENT:
"Congress should immediately pass a law creating a fully empowered Independent Commission Against Infrastructure Corruption."
In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
(December 12 - 15, 2025)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

	In Percent						
	AGREE	VERY MUCH AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	CANNOT SAY	DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	VERY MUCH DISAGREE
National (RP)	52	15	37	33	15	12	3
Metro Manila (NCR)	67	17	50	24	9	8	1
Balance Luzon (BL)	52	17	35	32	15	13	2
Visayas (VIS)	61	20	41	31	9	9	0
Mindanao (MIN)	35	4	31	40	24	14	10
Class C	40	7	34	41	24	14	10
Class D	54	16	38	32	14	12	3
Class E	51	17	34	35	14	12	5

(35%) and Class D (32%). Disagreement was highest among Class C respondents (24%), compared to 14% in Class D and 14% in Class E.

While public support for measures to combat corruption remains strong, evaluating the administration's comparative performance across key national issues provides a broader perspective on its governance effectiveness.

Comparative Performance Ratings of the Administration on Selected National Issues

The survey results on the comparative performance ratings of the national administration between September and December 2025 reveal a mix of stability and incremental improvements across various national issues. The administration maintained consistent approval ratings for several key areas, including protecting the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), responding to calamity-hit areas, and defending territorial integrity. Notably, the administration's efforts in creating more jobs and increasing workers' pay saw positive changes, with approval ratings increasing by 3 and 2 percentage points, respectively. These improvements reflect the administration's focus on addressing employment and income concerns, which are among the top priorities for Filipino citizens.

While the administration's approval ratings for fighting graft and corruption and maintaining the affordability of goods remain low, the consistent ratings suggest that the public recognizes ongoing efforts in these areas. However, these issues remain critical, as they are among the most urgent national concerns cited by respondents. The administration's performance in fighting illegal drugs and addressing environmental destruction saw a decline in approval ratings, accompanied by an increase in disapproval. This indicates heightened public awareness and expectations for more effective measures in these areas.

While the administration's performance on key national issues reflects areas of stability and improvement, understanding Filipinos' outlook on their personal quality of life and hopes for the upcoming year offers valuable insight into the broader public sentiment and expectations for the future.

Filipinos' Hope for the New Year and Personal Quality-of-Life Expectations

The Social Weather Stations Survey conducted in November 2025 revealed that 89% of adult Filipinos are entering the New Year with hope, marking the lowest level since 2009. This represents a steady decline from 96% in 2023 and 90% in 2024, indicating a gradual decrease in optimism over the past two years. Conversely, the percentage of Filipinos entering the New Year with fear has risen to 11%, the highest since 2009. Regionally, hope is most prevalent in Balance Luzon (92%), followed by Metro Manila (90%), the Visayas (85%), and Mindanao (84%), with slight declines in the latter two regions compared to 2024. The survey also found that hope is significantly influenced by expectations for Christmas, with those anticipating a happy holiday season expressing higher levels of hope (92%) than those expecting a sad Christmas (79%). Additionally, educational attainment plays a role, as college graduates (91%) and those with some senior high school education (93%) are more hopeful than elementary graduates (86%) and non-elementary graduates (81%). These results suggest that while hope remains the dominant sentiment, there is a noticeable decline in optimism as Filipinos face the challenges of the coming year.

As to the quality-of-life expectations, 44% of adult Filipinos are optimistic about their personal quality of life improving in the next 12 months, while 38% expect it to remain the same, and 8% anticipate it worsening. Optimism was highest among younger age groups, with 18-24-year-olds scoring an "Excellent" +54, followed by 25-34-year-olds at +41, while older age groups showed lower optimism, with those aged 55 and above scoring +28. Educational attainment also influenced optimism, with college graduates and those with some senior high school education scoring "Excellent" (+44), compared to elementary graduates (+31) and non-elementary graduates (+37). Notably, optimism was highest among "Gainers," or those who reported an improved quality of life over the past year, with an "Excellent" score of +58, while "Losers," or those whose quality of life worsened, scored a "High" +21. These findings highlight a mixed outlook among Filipinos, with younger and more educated individuals expressing greater optimism for the year ahead.

Despite a decline in optimism for the upcoming year, the Marcos Jr. administration's focus on social welfare and inclusivity aims to address the pressing needs of marginalized communities and improve the overall quality of life for Filipinos.

Social Welfare and Inclusivity

The Marcos Jr. administration has prioritized social welfare programs to address inequality and improve the quality of life for marginalized communities. Initiatives like the *Walang Gutom* program aim to eradicate hunger by 2028, while expanded medical assistance ensures access to healthcare for indigent patients. The integration of healthcare services into housing projects, such as the San Lazaro Residences, reflects a holistic approach to community development and social equity.

Despite these efforts, the administration must address the risks of inefficiencies in service delivery that could hinder the success of these programs. Poor funding or inadequate monitoring could prevent these initiatives from reaching the most vulnerable populations, perpetuating social inequities. To ensure the effectiveness of social welfare programs, the government must establish clear accountability mechanisms and prioritize the needs of marginalized communities.

Building on its commitment to social welfare and inclusivity, the Marcos Jr. administration has also prioritized economic resilience and development to address inequality and improve the overall quality of life for Filipinos.

Economic Resilience and Development

The administration's focus on economic stability and inclusive growth is evident in measures such as lowering rice import tariffs, implementing monetary policy adjustments, and providing financial aid to marginalized groups. These efforts have helped stabilize prices and improve the quality of life for Filipinos, while programs aimed at transitioning the Philippines to upper middle-income status reflect the government's ambition to enhance the country's global economic standing. Initiatives to address food insecurity and support local farmers further demonstrate a commitment to equitable development.

Nonetheless, the administration must ensure that these economic policies are sustainable and effectively implemented to avoid unintended consequences. Poorly executed measures, such as reduced rice import tariffs, could exacerbate food insecurity or lead to long-term economic instability. Additionally, the reliance on excess revenues and foreign loans raises



concerns about fiscal sustainability. To achieve lasting economic resilience, the government must focus on addressing structural challenges like poverty and inequality while ensuring that economic growth benefits all sectors of society.

To support economic resilience and development, the administration has prioritized infrastructure modernization as a key driver for enhancing connectivity, boosting competitiveness, and fostering sustainable growth.

Infrastructure Development and Modernization

Infrastructure modernization has been a key priority for the Marcos Jr. administration, with projects like the San Juanico Bridge rehabilitation, EDSA modernization, and NAIA Terminal 3 upgrades aimed at improving transportation and connectivity. The record-breaking budget for education facilities and water systems further highlights the government's focus on long-term development and public service enhancement. These initiatives are critical to boosting the country's competitiveness, attracting investments, and laying the groundwork for sustained economic growth.

Yet, the administration must address the risks of corruption and inefficiencies that could undermine these projects. The flood control project scandal serves as a cautionary example of how bad governance can lead to substandard or delayed infrastructure development. While the creation of the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI) is a positive step, the government must ensure that all projects are implemented transparently and efficiently. By prioritizing accountability and oversight, the administration can maximize the impact of its infrastructure investments and prevent misuse of public funds.

Building on its efforts to modernize infrastructure, the administration has also taken significant steps to strengthen maritime security and safeguard the nation's sovereignty in critical territorial waters.

Maritime Security and Sovereignty

The administration's assertive stance in protecting the country's territorial integrity in the West Philippine Sea is a significant step toward safeguarding national sovereignty. Diplomatic protests against China's aggressive actions and increased patrols, coupled with defense cooperation with allies like Japan, Vietnam, and the United States, demonstrate a commitment to maritime security. These efforts are crucial to ensuring the safety of Filipino fishermen and upholding international maritime laws.

However, the administration must carefully balance assertiveness with diplomacy to avoid escalating tensions in the region. Missteps in managing diplomatic relations could jeopardize peace and stability, potentially leading to conflicts that harm national interests. By fostering regional cooperation and adhering to international laws, the government can strengthen its position while maintaining constructive relationships with neighboring countries.

Building on its efforts to safeguard territorial integrity and enhance maritime security, the administration has also prioritized strengthening international partnerships and asserting regional leadership to address broader geopolitical challenges and drive national progress.

International Cooperation and Regional Leadership

The administration's active engagement with international partners, such as hosting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) event and preparing for ASEAN chairship in 2026, highlights the Philippines' growing role on the global stage. Diplomatic efforts with countries like France, Ukraine, and Australia have focused on defense, food security, and sustainability, positioning the country as a key player in regional and global affairs.

On the other hand, the administration must ensure that these partnerships translate into tangible benefits for the Filipino people. Poor governance in managing international cooperation could result in missed opportunities or agreements that fail to address national priorities. By aligning global engagements with domestic needs and fostering transparency in international dealings, the government can maximize the impact of these partnerships and strengthen its regional leadership.

As the administration enhances its global partnerships and regional leadership, it is simultaneously prioritizing digital transformation and cybersecurity to modernize governance and ensure resilience in an increasingly interconnected world.

Digital Transformation and Cybersecurity

The administration's push for digital transformation reflects a forward-thinking approach to modern governance. Efforts to improve connectivity in schools, implement cybersecurity reforms, and leverage blockchain technology for budget transparency aim to enhance public service delivery and reverse the country's digital decline. These initiatives are crucial to positioning the Philippines as a competitive player in the global digital economy.

That said, challenges such as allegations of budget insertions and inefficiencies in implementing digital reforms must be addressed to ensure their success. Mismanagement in digital infrastructure development could hinder progress and leave the country vulnerable to cybersecurity threats. By prioritizing effective implementation and addressing governance risks, the administration can build a robust digital ecosystem that supports national development.

While advancing digital transformation and cybersecurity to modernize governance, the Marcos Jr. administration is also prioritizing sustainability and renewable energy to ensure long-term environmental and energy security.

Sustainability and Renewable Energy

The Marcos Jr. administration's emphasis on sustainability and renewable energy aligns with global environmental goals and demonstrates a commitment to reducing reliance on traditional energy sources. The addition of 956 megawatts of power capacity, including renewable energy projects and energy storage systems, reflects a proactive approach to addressing energy security and promoting cleaner alternatives. The government's goal to energize 4 million households by 2028, with a focus on solar power and grid stability, highlights its dedication to ensuring access to sustainable energy for all Filipinos.

The success of these initiatives, however, depends on effective implementation and collaboration with private sector stakeholders. Inadequate funding or poor governance could hinder the progress of renewable energy projects, leaving many communities without access to clean energy. To achieve its sustainability goals, the administration must ensure equitable access to renewable energy resources, particularly for underserved areas, and establish robust monitoring systems to track progress. By addressing these challenges, the government can position the Philippines as a regional leader in renewable energy adoption while mitigating the environmental impact of energy production.

As the Marcos Jr. administration works toward sustainability and renewable energy goals, it also emphasizes military professionalism and stability to safeguard national security and uphold constitutional governance.

Military Professionalism and Stability

The administration has shown strong support for the military and law enforcement agencies, emphasizing professionalism and integrity. Increased pay and allowances for uniformed personnel reflect the government's recognition of their sacrifices and contributions to national security. Efforts to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to address evolving security challenges further demonstrate the administration's commitment to maintaining stability and ensuring the country's readiness to respond to domestic and international threats.

However, the administration must remain cautious about the risks of politicization or lack of professionalism within the military. Calls for military intervention in government affairs, if not firmly rejected, could undermine constitutional governance and destabilize the nation. To safeguard stability, the government must continue to uphold the principles of civilian control over the military and invest in training programs that emphasize ethical conduct and accountability. By fostering a professional and apolitical military, the administration can ensure the long-term security and stability of the country.

In summary, while the Marcos Jr. administration has made notable strides in addressing national challenges, the risks

of bad governance—such as corruption, inefficiency, and mismanagement—must be continuously addressed. Hence, a governance outlook for 2026 under the Marcos Jr. administration is subsequently provided.

A 2026 Governance Outlook for the Marcos Jr. Administration

The Marcos Jr. administration enters 2026 with a focus on addressing governance challenges and advancing reforms to ensure sustainable national development. Transparency and accountability remain central to its agenda, with legislative priorities such as the CADENA Act and the Independent People's Commission Act aiming to combat corruption and rebuild public trust. These measures, if effectively implemented, could strengthen institutional safeguards and promote open governance.

Economic resilience and development will continue to be a cornerstone of the administration's strategy. Efforts to stabilize prices, support local industries, and transition the Philippines to upper middle-income status are expected to persist, alongside infrastructure modernization projects to enhance connectivity and competitiveness. However, addressing risks of inefficiencies and corruption in implementation will be critical to achieving these goals.

Maritime security and sovereignty will remain a priority, particularly in light of intensified Chinese coercion in the West Philippine Sea. The administration's CADC and strengthened defense partnerships with allies such as the U.S., Japan, and Canada will play a pivotal role in safeguarding territorial integrity and upholding international maritime laws. As the Philippines prepares to chair ASEAN in 2026, it is uniquely positioned to champion regional cooperation and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Digital transformation and cybersecurity reforms will be key to modernizing governance and improving public service delivery. Sustainability and renewable energy initiatives, including solar power projects and energy storage systems, will further the administration's commitment to environmental security and equitable access to resources.

While the administration has made strides in reform and development, persistent risks of bad governance, corruption, and inefficiencies must be addressed to ensure the success of its initiatives. By prioritizing transparency, inclusivity, and accountability, the Marcos Jr. administration has the opportunity to lay a strong foundation for sustainable progress and regional leadership in 2026.

As the Marcos Jr. administration continues to address domestic governance challenges and implement reforms, its focus on regional security and multi-domain strategies highlights its commitment to safeguarding national sovereignty and stability amidst evolving geopolitical tensions.

II. CHARTING STABILITY THROUGH A MULTI-DOMAIN APPROACH TO REGIONAL SECURITY

The fourth quarter of 2025 saw intensified Chinese coercion in the West Philippine Sea, accompanied by coordinated cognitive and disinformation operations. The Marcos Jr. administration responded by strengthening the Armed Forces' capabilities across multiple domains, including maritime, air, cyber, and civil-military operations. Defense partnerships with like-minded states were deepened, enhancing joint operations, training, and multilateral cooperation. Looking ahead, the Philippines will chair ASEAN in 2026, positioning itself to reinforce regional stability, uphold the rules-based order, and serve as a credible bridge between member states and external partners.

State of Archipelagic Affairs: Intensifying Aggression and Multi-Domain

While Chinese coercion in the West Philippine Sea is not new, the developments in the fourth quarter of 2025 are deeply concerning due to their intensity, scope, and regularity. Recent incidents across different parts of Philippine waters have demonstrated a sustained pattern of aggressive, excessive, and dangerous behavior, posing direct threats to the lives

of Filipino civilians and maritime personnel. What were once episodic acts of harassment have evolved into a persistent campaign that systematically undermines regional stability and challenges the rules-based international order.

On October 12, Chinese maritime forces employed water cannons and deliberately rammed a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel near Pag-asa Island during a humanitarian mission to support Filipino fishermen. On December 12 at Escoda Shoal, Filipino artisanal fishers were injured, their boats damaged, and their safety deliberately endangered by water cannoning, hazardous maneuvers, and the cutting of anchor lines. These incidents reflect a systematic effort to advance narrow interests at the expense of human lives.

Beyond the immediate danger to lives, the scope of China's coercive actions is expanding across multiple domains and includes disinformation campaigns to further its narrative. In October, Chinese vessels began issuing radio challenges invoking its "environmental reserve" at Bajo de Masinloc, an illegitimate and unlawful attempt to reinforce exclusionary control and restrict Filipino access to traditional fishing grounds. Shortly after, on December 8, Chinese forces fired flares toward a Philippine BFAR aircraft conducting a lawful patrol, signaling the extension of intimidation from the maritime to the air domain.

Simultaneously, malign influence and disinformation campaigns have been deployed to discredit Philippine institutions, divide the ranks of the Armed Forces, and undermine public trust. These include coordinated efforts reported by the AFP to agitate retired and active personnel, as well as false claims circulated by Chinese-linked networks alleging that Filipino fishermen were wielding knives during the December 12 encounter at the Escoda Shoal.

Together, these developments reveal a coordinated, multi-domain strategy that blends physical coercion, legal distortion, and cognitive warfare. This is the state of archipelagic affairs that the Philippines faces at the close of 2025.

Enhancing the Philippines' Multi-Domain Capability

The Marcos Jr. administration's foreign and security policy has remained consistent in addressing the challenges posed by regional coercion: the twin pillars of building the country's capability and strengthening partnerships. Central to this approach is the recognition that national security must shift from an internal focus to a robust external posture capable of deterring aggression, protecting sovereignty, and safeguarding the Filipino people. The government has pursued a comprehensive strategy to align modernization, force development, and operational readiness across the AFP and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), ensuring that the country can respond effectively to multi-domain threats.

Significant strides have been made in bolstering capability across maritime, air, cyber, and cognitive domains during the fourth quarter. The AFP formally activated two key commands in late 2025. The Strategic Command, inaugurated in October, integrates intelligence, operations, and civil-military functions, serving as a central hub for enhanced decision-making, joint exercises, and interoperability with allied forces. It reflects a strategic shift from reactive defense toward proactive deterrence, addressing complex and emerging security challenges, including cyber threats and disinformation. Complementing this, the Civil-Military Operations (CMO) Command, activated in November, integrates civil-military operations with information and cognitive warfare, aligning communication, community engagement, and stakeholder coordination to respond effectively to modern challenges while maintaining credibility and public trust in an increasingly complex multi-domain battle space. Together, these commands represent the AFP's holistic approach to modern defense, blending traditional military strength with capabilities across cyber, informational, and cognitive domains.

Maritime and aerial capabilities have also seen substantial upgrades. The Philippine Navy transformed its Naval Air Wing into the Naval Air Warfare Force (NAWF), enhancing air surveillance, reconnaissance, and maritime patrol operations. This new force now operates alongside the Offshore Combat Force, Littoral Combat Force, and Sealift Amphibious Force, strengthening joint maritime domain awareness and operational readiness amid persistent West Philippine Sea tensions. The government's commitment to expanding the Philippines' maritime capabilities is further demonstrated by plans to acquire submarines through collaboration with South Korean shipbuilder Hanwha Ocean, including the construction of a submarine base, establishment of local maintenance facilities, and training for Filipino naval operators.

These capability enhancements are reinforced through rigorous joint exercises and cyber readiness initiatives that

translate modernization into operational effectiveness. The Armed Forces of the Philippines conducted the joint exercise DAGIT-PA 09-2025 from November 4 to 14, incorporating realistic scenarios across the sea, air, and land domains under the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC) to ensure the Armed Forces can defend all Philippine territories, including the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone, for twenty to thirty days before allied reinforcements arrive. A crucial component of DAGIT-PA has been the Information Warfighting Exercise, which sharpened the Armed Forces' ability to synchronize operations within the information environment, enhance situational awareness, and strengthen response capabilities in the face of multi-domain threats. On the cyber front, the Department of National Defense conducted the Cyber Exercise 2025, engaging its cyber offices, attached agencies, and international observers to test defensive protocols against sophisticated digital threats, including targeted intrusions, ransomware attacks, and coordinated disinformation campaigns.

Continuing Commitment to Multilateral Defense Cooperation

The Marcos Jr. administration has actively deepened the Philippines' defense and security partnerships in the fourth quarter of 2025. Notably, on November 2, the Philippines and Canada signed a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, the first such agreement Canada has concluded with a country in the Indo-Pacific. The agreement, signed by Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Canadian Defense Minister David McGuinty, provides a legal framework for Canadian forces to conduct combat drills and participate in joint maritime activities within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. Canada is expected to send the third-largest contingent in the 2026 Exercise Balikatan, which will include more than 500 joint military activities ranging from large-scale exercises to subject-matter expert exchanges. The agreement builds on the Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation signed last year, signaling the growing depth and scope of Philippine-Canada defense relations.

Likewise, the Philippines and France concluded the second round of negotiations on a proposed Philippines-France Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, reinforcing the bilateral legal foundation for military cooperation. Discussions focused on joint military engagements, interoperability, and expanding multilateral exercises. Senior officials also reviewed planned 2026 activities, including the Multinational Exercise MARARA, Exercise Balikatan, and Exercise SAMASAMA, demonstrating tangible operational outputs that enhance readiness and coordination between the two militaries. These initiatives align with the 2023 Letter of Intent between Manila and Paris, further solidifying France as a like-minded partner in upholding a rules-based international order and ensuring regional stability.

The Philippines' partnership with the United States remains the cornerstone of its defense strategy as its only treaty ally. On November 1, the Philippines joined the United States, Japan, and Australia in establishing the Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Cooperation Council to enhance joint deterrence, operational readiness, and coordination in response to China's destabilizing actions in the East and South China Sea. This partnership is further reinforced by the Philippines Enhanced Resilience Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in December, which allocates USD2.5 billion in security assistance over five years, including up to USD500 million in Foreign Military Financing grants from 2026 to 2030. The funding will strengthen coastal defense, long-range fires, integrated air defenses, maritime security, manned and unmanned aerial systems, mechanized ground mobility, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and defensive cybersecurity capabilities. These measures underscore the unique and indispensable role of the U.S.-Philippine alliance in safeguarding national security, deterring aggression, and reinforcing a free and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

At the regional and multilateral level, the Philippines also strengthened cooperation with other partners. On November 25, the Philippines and the European Union convened the inaugural Security and Defense Dialogue in Brussels, discussing maritime security, hybrid threats, cybersecurity, foreign information manipulation and interference, and countering violent extremism.

This commitment to strengthening defense partnerships aligns with public sentiment, as highlighted by a recent national survey identifying the countries Filipinos trust and believe the government should collaborate with to safeguard national interests in the Philippine seas.

Public Trust and Strategic Partnerships in the Philippine Seas

The survey results as to the entities that Philippines should work with in mitigating the rising tensions in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) highlight the countries and organizations that Filipinos trust and believe the Marcos administration should collaborate with to assert the nation's rights and protect its interests in the WPS. The United States emerged as the most trusted entity, with 82% of respondents across the Philippines selecting it. Trust in the United States was highest in NCR (84%) and lowest in Mindanao (77%). Among socio-economic classes, Class E showed the highest trust (90%). Japan ranked second, with 64% of respondents expressing trust, with the highest trust in NCR (74%) and the lowest in Visayas (40%). Canada followed closely, trusted by 58% of respondents, with the highest trust in Balance Luzon (68%) and the lowest in Mindanao (42%). Australia was trusted by 51% of respondents, with the highest trust in NCR (57%) and the lowest in Visayas (50%). South Korea garnered 37% trust, with the highest trust in Balance Luzon (42%) and the lowest in Mindanao (29%). Great Britain/United Kingdom (UK) was trusted by 33% of respondents, with the highest trust in Class C (40%) and the lowest in Visayas (22%). European Union (EU) was trusted by 27% of respondents, with the highest trust in NCR (35%) and the lowest in Visayas (17%). Taiwan and China were trusted by 12% and 11% of respondents, respectively, with the highest trust in NCR (18% for Taiwan and 12% for China). India was trusted by only 4% of respondents, with the highest trust in NCR (6%) and the lowest in Visayas (2%). Unaided responses (e.g., "Cannot say," "Refused," or "None") were minimal, with only 1% of respondents unable to provide an answer.

The survey results underscore the strong preference of Filipinos for traditional allies, particularly the United States and Japan, in addressing territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea. Western countries such as Canada, Australia, and the UK also received significant trust, while China and India were among the least trusted entities. Socio-economic class and geographic location influenced the level of trust, with Class E respondents showing higher trust in the United States and Japan, while respondents from Visayas and Mindanao showed relatively lower trust in some Western countries.

Table 3
Entities Which The Marcos Administration Should Work
With Amidst The Continuing Tension In The West Philippine Sea
In Percent / Multiple Response, Up to 5: **PHILIPPINES**
(December 12 - 15, 2025)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

	RP	In Percent				CLASS		
		LOCATION				C	D	E
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN			
United States	82	84	85	77	77	81	76	90
Japan	64	74	70	40	68	68	70	59
Canada	58	57	68	42	42	49	57	46
Australia	51	57	50	52	52	50	60	44
South Korea	37	33	42	29	29	35	43	34
Great Britain/UK	33	31	35	22	22	40	38	39
European Union (EU)	27	35	32	17	17	20	33	29
Taiwan	12	18	9	4	4	21	11	11
China	11	12	9	12	12	13	20	10
India	4	6	4	2	2	5	7	3
Cannot say / Refused / None	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0

Strengthening Regional Security: The Philippines' Strategic Shift and ASEAN Leadership

In response to rising Chinese coercion in the West Philippine Sea, the Philippines has adopted a bold and comprehensive approach to safeguard its territorial integrity and maritime resources. The Marcos administration's CADC represents the nation's first grand strategy since independence, shifting the AFP from a land-centric internal security focus to a multi-domain territorial defense posture. This strategic pivot emphasizes deterrence and the development of anti-access and area-denial capabilities across the country's vast archipelagic waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). By enhancing maritime situational awareness, connectivity, intelligence capabilities, and forward defense infrastructure, the CADC aims to transform Philippine-held islands and maritime territories into defensible outposts, ensuring the protection of natural resources and the enforcement of sovereignty against external threats.

As the Philippines prepares to assume the ASEAN chairship in 2026, the CADC aligns with broader regional security objectives, including countering Chinese expansionism and fostering stability in the Indo-Pacific. The strategy underscores the importance of strengthening the AFP's capabilities across land, air, and maritime domains while deepening security partnerships with like-minded nations such as the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. Through joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and strategic basing initiatives, the Philippines is positioning itself as a critical player in a revived 21st-century First Island Chain Strategy. This interconnected defense network, supported by U.S. naval and air power, aims to impose costs on Chinese expansion and ensure a rules-based order in the region. As ASEAN chair, the Philippines is uniquely positioned to champion regional cooperation and collective security, leveraging its leadership role to address shared challenges and promote peace and stability in the face of growing geopolitical tensions.

Looking Ahead

The Philippines is set to chair ASEAN in 2026 under the theme "Navigating Our Future, Together," with priorities centered on peace and security anchors, prosperity corridors, and people empowerment. The Philippines will be in a strategically strong position to address regional issues, given its relations not only with fellow ASEAN member states but also with key ASEAN dialogue partners. At the end of the day, addressing regional issues will depend not only on ASEAN member states but also on external stakeholders with a direct and enduring stake in the region's stability.

Ultimately, as chair, the Philippines can prioritize strengthening partnerships and mechanisms that reinforce regional stability and uphold the rules-based order. Nonetheless, while the Philippines has expressed commitment to advancing the long-delayed Code of Conduct negotiations, it is essential for the government to exercise prudence to ensure that any agreement does not undermine Philippine rights, particularly those affirmed by international law and the 2016 Arbitral Award. The country can also underscore that China's aggressive actions are not merely a bilateral concern but a regional threat that undermines stability and the broader international maritime order. Raising this concern within ASEAN can highlight that tensions in the South China Sea carry consequences beyond Philippine borders.

While the Marcos Jr. administration advances its multi-domain approach to regional security, its legislative efforts remain pivotal in addressing systemic challenges and laying the groundwork for sustainable governance and national development.

III. LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND UPDATE

In the fourth quarter of 2025, 13 bills of the 44 identified priorities by the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) progressed significantly. Twelve bills have been approved by the House of Representatives at third and final reading and are currently pending at the Committee-Level at the Senate, while a thirteenth bill, the Amendments to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, has hurdled the committee and is currently pending at the House Plenary. The 12 House-approved bills are as follows:

1. Electric Power Industry Reform Act Amendments: Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) Strengthening Bill
2. Amendments to the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education Act

3. Amendments to the National Building Code,
4. Blue Economy Act
5. National Center for Geriatric Health Act,
6. Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) Act,
7. Amendments to the Teachers Professionalization Act,
8. Extension of Estate Tax Amnesty
9. Department of Water Resources
10. Amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering Act
11. National Reintegration Act
12. Waste-to-Energy Act

On December 9, 2025, the LEDAC, at the behest of the President, added four bills to its 44 legislative priorities. These bills, together with the house-approved Amendment to the Anti-Money Laundering Act, highlight the administration's commitment to good governance -- an issue that will continue to shape the second half of the Marcos Jr. Administration and the President's legacy. Should they be signed into law, these bills will revolutionize transparency and the political landscape in the country. These four bills are:

1. Citizens Access and Disclosure of Expenditures for National Accountability (CADENA) Act – Approved by the Senate on 3rd and final Reading, Pending at the House Committee Level

The CADENA Act mandates the creation of a centralized Digital Budget Portal that will serve as a one-stop platform for citizens to access full details of the national budget and government expenditures. This covers all stages of the budget cycle — from planning and authorization to execution and disbursement.

It is a significant legislative proposal aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability in government financial operations. By mandating the creation of a centralized Digital Budget Portal, the act empowers citizens to access comprehensive details of the national budget and government expenditures across all stages of the budget cycle, including planning, authorization, execution, and disbursement. This initiative aligns with global trends toward open governance and digital transparency, fostering public trust and enabling informed civic participation. If implemented effectively, the CADENA Act could serve as a critical tool in combating corruption and ensuring responsible fiscal management.

2. Independent People's Commission Act - Pending at the Committee Level in Both Houses – Undergoing Interpellation at the Senate, Pending at the House Committee Level

The Independent People's Commission is envisioned as a body, independent from the three branches of government, that will investigate reported or alleged irregularities in the planning, procurement, and implementation of government infrastructure projects. It may recommend the prosecution of individuals or entities involved in the alleged anomalies.

By being independent from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the commission aims to ensure impartiality and credibility in its investigations. Its ability to recommend prosecution for individuals or entities involved in anomalies could serve as a deterrent against corruption and mismanagement. If enacted, this legislation could strengthen institutional checks and balances, promote accountability, and enhance public trust in government processes, particularly in infrastructure development.

3. Anti-Political Dynasty Bill - Pending at the Committee Level in Both Houses

The bill seeks to limit relatives from holding elective office simultaneously or successively. The multiple bills vary on the definition as to the persons and elective positions covered. Most bill define "relatives" as a person within the fourth degree of consanguinity or affinity. However, there are a range of proposals as to elective positions covered. Some bills have categorized elective positions into national, provincial, local, and legislative positions and prohibits "relatives" from running simultaneously or successively only within each category. As an example, relatives cannot run or be elected for more than one national position, but they can run for one national position, one legislative position, one provincial position, and one

local position in the same elections.

It further seeks to address the concentration of political power within families by limiting relatives from holding elective positions simultaneously or successively. By curbing political dynasties, the bill aims to promote fairer electoral competition, reduce nepotism, and encourage broader representation in governance, fostering a more equitable political landscape.

4. Party-list System Reform Act - Pending at the Committee Level in Both Houses

The amendment to the Party-List System stems from President Marcos' view that it has been abused by politicians to advance their own interest and seeks to limit party list groups to those that genuinely cater to the concerns of marginalized and under-represented sectors. Some versions of the bill prohibit relatives of incumbent officials and any person who has been a contractor in any government project from becoming a Party List group nominee.

The Party-list System Reform Act aims to restore the original intent of the party-list system by ensuring it genuinely represents marginalized and underrepresented sectors. By restricting nominees with ties to incumbent officials or government contractors, the bill seeks to prevent the exploitation of the system by political elites and promote inclusivity and fairness in political representation.

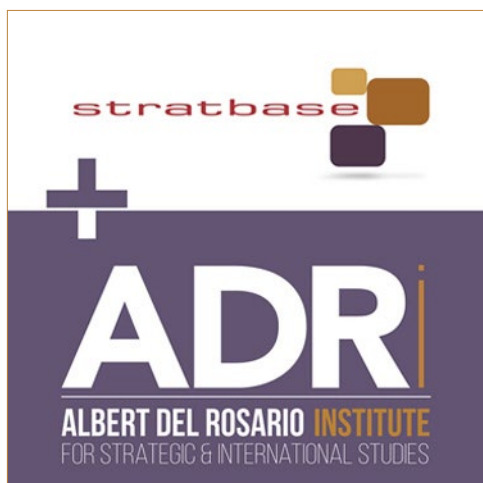
It further addresses concerns that the current system has been co-opted by political elites and groups with vested interests, undermining its purpose of representing marginalized sectors. In introducing stricter eligibility criteria for nominees, such as prohibiting relatives of incumbent officials and government contractors, the bill aims to eliminate conflicts of interest and ensure genuine advocacy for underrepresented communities. If enacted, this reform could strengthen the integrity of the party-list system and enhance public trust in its role within the democratic process.

The First Regular Session of the Twentieth Congress reconvened last November 10, 2025, and continued until December 22, 2025. While it is currently under adjournment, from December 23 to January 25, 2026, the Session is set to resume on January 26, 2026 and will continue until March 20, 2026.



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 © 2025 Stratbase ADR Institute
All rights reserved.