

POLÍTIKA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY

1ST QUARTER



Navigating Turbulence: Converting Challenges into Opportunities in the First Quarter of 2026

The Philippines faced significant challenges in early 2026. The government's proactive measures in defense, reforms, and economic recovery showcased resilience and adaptability



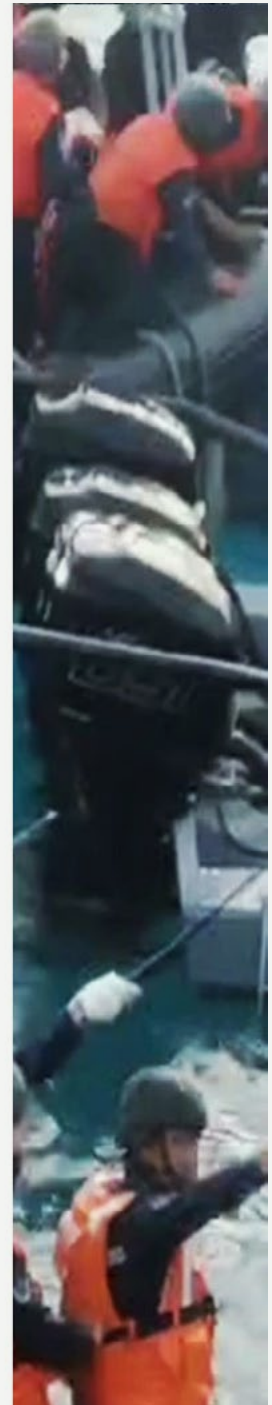
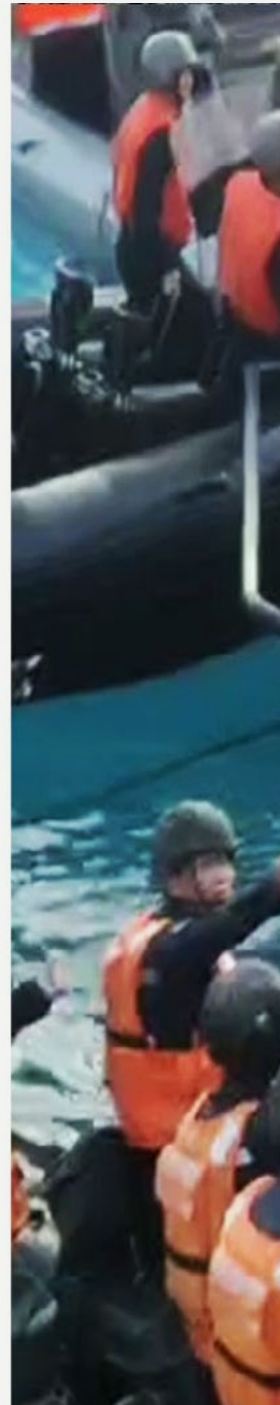
Charting the Indo-Pacific: The Philippines' Path to Regional Leadership and Resilience

The Philippines is leveraging its strategic location in the Indo-Pacific to assert regional leadership by strengthening defense partnerships with allies and promoting maritime security.

Legislative Developments and Update

LEDAC identified 21 priority bills for passage before June. Key developments include the enactment of the BARMM election reset law and progress on the Geriatric Health Act

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OVERVIEW

The first quarter of 2026 was a pivotal period for the Philippines, as the nation faced a mix of challenges and opportunities that could shape its future. From geopolitical tensions in the West Philippine Sea to economic disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict and rising oil prices, the government has been navigating turbulent waters. Despite these hurdles, the administration has demonstrated a proactive approach to turning adversity into progress.

Under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the government has focused on national security, economic recovery, anti-corruption, and public welfare. Defense modernization and strengthened alliances with the U.S. and Japan have bolstered the country's sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea. Investigations into corruption scandals, particularly those tied to flood control projects, have led to reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability.

Economic resilience remains a top priority, with initiatives to diversify trade, attract foreign investments, and support small businesses. Efforts to address inflation, unemployment, and food security, including free trade agreements, fuel subsidies, and infrastructure development, are underway. Healthcare and education have also been prioritized, with expanded programs to improve access for all Filipinos.

As ASEAN chair and a candidate for a UN Security Council seat, the Philippines is asserting itself as a key player in global diplomacy. Multilateral maritime cooperative activities with allies like the U.S., Japan, and Australia underscore the Philippines' commitment to regional stability.

Despite political controversies and governance challenges, the administration is striving to strengthen institutions and promote unity. By addressing corruption, fostering transparency, and prioritizing climate-resilient infrastructure, the government is laying the foundation for sustainable development.

The Philippines is at a critical juncture, transforming risks into opportunities to build a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous nation. With strategic partnerships, decisive governance, and public engagement, the country is poised to lead in the Indo-Pacific and secure a brighter future for all Filipinos.

I. NAVIGATING TURBULENCE: CONVERTING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2026

The first quarter of 2026 was a whirlwind for the Philippines, with the government facing a mix of challenges and opportunities that could shape the nation's future. From territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea to rising oil prices caused by the Middle East conflict, the country has been navigating turbulent waters. Yet, amidst these risks, there lies an opportunity to turn adversity into progress.

The administration has shown a proactive approach in addressing these issues, focusing on national security, economic recovery, anti-corruption, and public welfare. For instance, while tensions in the West Philippine Sea remain a pressing concern, the government's defense modernization efforts and strengthened partnerships with allies like the US and Japan offer hope for a more secure and sovereign nation. Similarly, corruption scandals tied to flood control projects have sparked investigations and reforms that could pave the way for greater transparency and accountability.

Economic challenges, such as inflation and unemployment, have been met with initiatives to diversify trade, attract foreign investments, and support small businesses. Meanwhile, the Nipah virus outbreak has highlighted the importance of prioritizing healthcare and education, with expanded programs aimed at improving access for all Filipinos.

Infrastructure development, political controversies, and climate-related risks also pose significant hurdles. However, the administration's focus on climate-resilient projects, unity in governance, and sustainable practices could turn these challenges into stepping stones for progress.

With the Philippines taking on a leadership role in ASEAN and campaigns for a seat in the UN Security Council, the nation has an opportunity to assert itself as a key player in global diplomacy. The road ahead may be tough, but with decisive action and a commitment to reform, the country can transform risks into opportunities and build a brighter future for all Filipinos.

As the Philippines faces a series of complex challenges and opportunities in the first quarter of 2026, the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. plays a pivotal role in shaping the nation's trajectory.

The Leadership Context

The Pulse Asia survey on the trust ratings of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice-President Sara Duterte provides a snapshot of public sentiment toward the country's top leaders. While both leaders have areas of strength, the data also reveal challenges that need to be addressed to maintain public trust and improve governance.

President Marcos Jr.: Constructive Opportunities

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s trust and approval ratings show mixed results, with approval at 36% and trust at 35%, while disapproval and distrust stand at 45% and 44%, respectively. Despite challenges, his ratings have improved year-on-year, with notable gains in job creation (+10%) and promoting peace (+10%). Inflation remains the top concern for 59% of Filipinos, highlighting the need for effective economic policies to address rising costs. To rebuild trust, the President must deliver tangible results in areas such as poverty reduction and corruption that affect Filipinos' daily lives. Fostering unity across regions and socioeconomic classes is also critical to strengthening governance and improving public sentiment toward his administration.

Vice-President Duterte: Challenges of Disinformation

Vice-President Sara Duterte's approval (55%) and trust ratings (54%) are higher than President Marcos Jr.'s, but her disapproval (+11%) and distrust (+10%) have risen significantly. Strong support in Mindanao (95%) and Visayas (72%) contrasts with waning popularity in Metro Manila and Luzon. Disinformation and manipulated narratives amplify her strengths

while downplaying weaknesses, creating a fragile foundation for her popularity. Allegations of corruption tied to confidential funds have fueled distrust.

Table 1
Trust Ratings of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.
and Vice-President Sara Duterte
In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
(February 27 – March 2, 2026)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

	Base: Total Interviews, 100%							
	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
TRUST								
President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.	35	38	54	17	10	36	36	24
Vice-President Sara Duterte	54	45	29	67	97	31	56	78
UNDECIDED								
President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.	21	17	25	22	13	21	21	13
Vice-President Sara Duterte	20	27	28	17	2	20	21	13
DISTRUST								
President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.	44	45	22	61	77	43	43	64
Vice-President Sara Duterte	26	28	43	15	1	49	23	9

Q12. Nais sana naming tanungin kayo tungkol sa pagtitiwala ninyo sa ilang mga tao sa ating lipunan. Sa pamamagitan po ng board na ito, maaari bang pakisabi kung gaano kalaki o kaliit ang iyong pagtitiwala kay/sa (PERSONALIDAD)? Masasabi ba ninyo na ito ay (SHOW AND READ RATING BOARD)?

Comparative Analysis of Trust, Indecision, and Distrust in the President and Vice-President

The Stratbase-commissioned Pulse Asia survey provides insights into the reasons for trusting, being undecided about, or distrusting President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr. and Vice-President Sara Duterte. While both leaders have garnered trust from segments of the population, the survey highlights significant differences in public perception, particularly regarding negative sentiments toward Vice-President Duterte.

Trust in President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr.

The leading reason for trusting President Marcos is his efforts to fight corruption, cited by 28.6% of respondents. This sentiment is particularly strong among Metro Manilans (37.1%) and those in Class D (30.3%). Other reasons for trust include his initiatives to improve the lives of Filipinos (10.9%), help calamity-hit areas (12.4%), and support farmers (9.9%). However, trust in the President is not uniform across regions and socioeconomic classes, with Mindanawons and Class ABC respondents emphasizing his disaster relief efforts and financial assistance.

Indecision Toward President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr.

A significant portion of respondents (39.3%) expressed indecision about trusting the President, primarily due to his failure to control inflation and the rising prices of basic commodities. This concern is most pronounced in the rest of Luzon (51.8%) and Class D (44.2%). Other reasons for indecision include his inability to address economic problems (8.4%), failure to fulfill promises (9.8%), and lack of action against corruption (17.3%).

Distrust in President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr.

Distrust in President Marcos is widespread, with 44% of respondents expressing negative opinions about his trustworthiness. The reasons for distrust are diverse, the most cited being his failure to fight corruption (16.7%), fulfill promises (15.3%), perform his duties (13.8%), and control inflation (12.3%). Allegations of involvement in corruption (12.0%) and failure to address criminality (10.1%) also contribute to the negative perception. Distrust is particularly high in Metro Manila, where 20.5% of respondents cited his alleged involvement in corruption as the primary reason.

Trust in Vice-President Sara Duterte

The majority of respondents (54%) trust Vice-President Sara Duterte, but their reasons are varied. The top reasons include her perceived capability to govern (12.8%), being pro-poor (12.7%), courage (12.4%), and helpfulness (9.1%). In Metro Manila, 26.4% of respondents trust her for her leadership capabilities, while Visayans and Mindanawons emphasize her courage and helpfulness. Her association with her father, former President Duterte, is also a factor for some respondents.

Indecision Toward Vice-President Sara Duterte

A significant portion of respondents (20%) expressed indecision about trusting the Vice-President, with the leading reason being her failure to address allegations of corruption related to the misuse of confidential funds allocated to the Office of the Vice-President and the Department of Education (DepEd). This sentiment is shared by a majority of respondents across all regions and socioeconomic classes, with percentages ranging from 42.2% to 81.7%. Other reasons for indecision include a lack of knowledge about her accomplishments (17.8%) and her refusal to face investigations (10.3%).

Distrust in Vice-President Sara Duterte

The survey reveals a stark negative perception of Vice-President Sara Duterte, with 26% of respondents expressing distrust. The leading reason for this sentiment is her alleged involvement in corrupt activities, cited by 51.5% of respondents nationwide. This perception is particularly strong in Mindanao (73.3%) and Class ABC (90.7%). Additionally, 21.4% of respondents distrust her due to her perceived threats against the administration and critics. Other reasons include her perceived rudeness (5.4%), lack of accomplishments (5.1%), frequent foreign travels (4.5%), and failure to perform her duties (2.5%).

Using the March 24-31, 2026 Social Weather Survey, gross trust (Much trust among those aware) in Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is at 35% versus 57% for Sara Duterte, a national gap that reflects divergent regional and demographic compositions. Marcos’s profile is relatively even across areas but with modest ceilings: 32% in NCR, 43% in Balance Luzon, 35% in the Visayas, and 20% in Mindanao. Duterte’s advantage is driven by very strong pillars—90% in Mindanao and 61% in the Visayas—plus a clear 47% in NCR and near parity in Balance Luzon at 42%. The geography indicates Marcos is most competitive in Balance Luzon, while Duterte relies on overwhelming Mindanao strength to anchor a higher national level.

By locale, Marcos posts 32% in urban areas and 39% in rural areas, suggesting slightly better resonance in rural communities without translating into regional dominance; Duterte remains broadly stronger at 55% urban and 60% rural. By sex, Marcos registers 36% among males and 34% among females, while Duterte maintains 59% and 56%, respectively, showing a durable edge across both groups.

Across socio-economic classes, Marcos records 41% in ABC, 34% in D, and 42% in E; Duterte leads in each at 56%, 59%, and 50%. Age splits reveal the clearest structural difference: Marcos improves steadily with age—27% (18–24), 27% (25–34), 33% (35–44), 41% (45–54), peaking at 49% among 55+—and is the only segment where he surpasses Duterte (who posts 45% among 55+). Duterte’s strength concentrates among younger and midlife cohorts—57% (18–24), 64% (25–34), 64% (35–44), and 55% (45–54)—which materially lifts her aggregate.

Education further differentiates them: Marcos’s gross trust declines as schooling rises—approximately 47% (up to some elementary), 39% (up to some high school), 32% (up to some college), and 27% (college/post-grad). Duterte sustains higher levels even at the top end—about 56% (up to some college) and 50% (college/post-grad)—though the latter signals relative

softness among the most educated. In trajectory terms, Marcos's gross trust has fallen from mid-2024 highs (64% in July 2024) to 35% in March 2026, with a brief mid-2025 lift that faded. Duterte, while consistently higher, has hovered in the mid-50s to low-60s and sits at 57% in March 2026.

Objectively, Marcos remains nationally behind yet retains coherent pockets: Balance Luzon competitiveness, a rural tilt, and a senior advantage. A more critical reading of Duterte's lead highlights heavy dependence on Mindanao's extraordinary 90%, softer standing among seniors (45%) and college/post-grads (50%), and narrower margins in Balance Luzon—concentration risks that could matter if regional or segmental preferences shift.

The comparative analysis of the trust ratings, in short, highlights a significant negative perception of Vice-President Sara Duterte, with her alleged involvement in corruption being the most cited reason for distrust. This sentiment is particularly pronounced in Mindanao and Class ABC, where distrust levels are exceptionally high. Furthermore, her failure to address allegations of misuse of confidential funds has led to widespread indecision about her trustworthiness, with majorities in all regions and socioeconomic classes expressing ambivalence. Additionally, her early declaration as a presidential aspirant for the 2028 national elections did not in any way caused a spike in her ratings. These findings suggest that the Vice-President faces significant challenges in addressing public concerns about her integrity and governance, which affects her political aspirations and public image.

National Administration's Performance on Key Issues

The Pulse Asia survey comparing the national administration's performance ratings on selected national issues between December 2025 and March 2026 provides valuable insights into public sentiment. While the data reveal areas of progress, they also highlight significant challenges that the government must address to meet the expectations of the Filipino people.

Strengths and Opportunities

The survey shows that the administration received its highest approval rating (53%) for protecting the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). This is a positive indicator, as OFWs are a vital part of the economy and their well-being is a priority for many Filipinos. The administration's efforts in this area, such as providing support and ensuring their safety, have resonated with the public. This success can serve as a model for addressing other issues, particularly those that directly affect vulnerable sectors of society.

The administration also received relatively favorable ratings for responding to the needs of calamity-hit areas (46% approval) and defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreign threats (41% approval). These ratings suggest that the government's efforts in disaster response and national security are recognized by a significant portion of the population. These areas present opportunities for the administration to further strengthen its performance and build public trust.

Challenges and Risks

Despite these positive ratings, the survey highlights several areas where the administration is struggling to meet public expectations. Controlling inflation, the most urgent national concern for 59% of Filipinos, received a dismal approval rating of just 10%, with 73% disapproving of the government's efforts. Inflation directly affects the cost of living, and the public's dissatisfaction reflects the financial strain many families are experiencing. This issue is a critical risk for the administration, as failure to address it could lead to further erosion of public trust.

Similarly, the administration received high disapproval ratings for its handling of corruption (67%), poverty reduction (53%), and the fight against illegal drugs (68%). These issues are deeply rooted in the country's socio-political landscape and have long been sources of frustration for Filipinos. The lack of visible progress in these areas suggests that the government's strategies may not be effectively addressing the root causes of these problems.

Other areas of concern include environmental protection (42% disapproval), job creation (40% disapproval), and increasing workers' pay (45% disapproval). These issues are critical to the long-term development of the country. The administration's inability to meet public expectations in these areas poses a risk to its credibility.

Table 2
Comparative Performance Ratings of the National Administration
on Selected National Issues
In Percent: PHILIPPINES
 (December 2025 and March 2026)



PulseAsia
 RESEARCH INC.

Selected National Issues	Approval		Change*	Undecided		Change*	Disapproval		Change*
	Dec 25 (A)	Mar 26 (B)	Mar 26 Minus Dec 25 (B-A)	Dec 25 (C)	Mar 26 (D)	Mar 26 Minus Dec 25 (D-C)	Dec 25 (E)	Mar 26 (F)	Mar 26 Minus Dec 25 (F-E)
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	57	53	- 4	25	23	- 2	18	24	+ 6
Responding to the needs of areas affected by calamities	46	46	0	24	27	+ 3	30	28	- 2
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	43	41	- 2	34	35	+ 1	23	24	+ 1
Providing assistance to farmers including selling their products	38	38	0	27	28	+ 1	35	34	- 1
Preparing to face any kind of terrorism	38	37	- 1	38	38	0	25	25	0
Fighting criminality	31	36	+ 5	29	18	- 11	41	46	+ 5
Promoting peace in the country	30	35	+ 5	34	29	- 5	36	36	0
Creating more jobs	37	34	- 3	26	26	0	37	40	+ 3
Enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people	30	33	+ 3	37	31	- 6	33	37	+ 4
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	28	31	+ 3	37	27	- 10	35	42	+ 7
Increasing the pay of workers	37	29	- 8	24	26	+ 2	39	45	+ 6
Reducing the amount of taxes paid	24	28	+ 4	33	26	- 7	43	46	+ 3
Providing support to small entrepreneurs to restore their businesses	27	27	0	41	40	- 1	31	32	+ 1
Addressing the problem of involuntary hunger	24	26	+ 2	31	29	- 2	45	45	0
Fighting graft and corruption in government	17	17	0	15	15	0	68	67	- 1
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	16	16	0	29	31	+ 2	55	53	- 2
Fighting the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs	14	15	+ 1	19	17	- 2	67	68	+ 1
Controlling inflation	14	10	- 4	17	16	- 1	69	73	+ 4

*Change = Figures of UB March 2026 minus Figures UB December 2025

Path Toward Governance of Selected National Issues

The Philippine government faces significant challenges in addressing inflation, corruption, poverty, and illegal drugs, with disapproval ratings as high as 73% for inflation control. While protecting OFWs (53% approval) and disaster response (46%) are strengths, urgent action is needed to tackle economic concerns and governance issues. Stabilizing prices, fighting corruption, and creating jobs are critical priorities. Long-term solutions, such as sustainable development and infrastructure investment, are essential to rebuild public trust and improve the quality of life for Filipinos.

National Security and Sovereignty: Defending the Nation's Interests

The Philippines is addressing national security challenges, particularly territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea, through defense modernization and strengthened alliances with the U.S., Japan, and the UAE. Joint maritime exercises and new naval assets highlight its commitment to sovereignty. As ASEAN chair, the country is advancing the South China Sea Code of Conduct to promote peace while balancing diplomacy with firm defense of national interests; alongside enhancing internal security measures, including anti-espionage laws, and addressing foreign-linked threats. Transparency in reporting foreign vessel incidents fosters public trust. These efforts position the Philippines as a resilient and proactive leader in the Indo-Pacific region.

Anti-Corruption and Transparency: Building Trust Through Accountability

In the first quarter of 2026, the Philippine government made significant strides in combating corruption and promoting transparency to rebuild public trust. Investigations into corruption scandals, particularly those tied to flood control projects, have led to the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI)'s recommendation of charges against implicated lawmakers and officials. This demonstrates the administration's commitment to accountability and to dismantling the culture of impunity.

Transparency reforms have been a key focus, with the government introducing accessible budget portals for citizens to monitor public spending. Legislative proceedings are now live-streamed, and blockchain-powered systems have been adopted to track transactions, reducing opportunities for corruption. These measures empower citizens to actively participate in governance and hold officials accountable.

The administration has also implemented stricter monitoring mechanisms to ensure efficient and transparent use of public funds, particularly in infrastructure and social services projects. These efforts aim to prevent misuse and ensure equitable allocation of resources.

Despite challenges, the government's actions reflect a clear commitment to addressing systemic corruption. By combining accountability with innovative transparency measures, the administration is laying the groundwork for a more trustworthy and efficient government. These initiatives are not only about rectifying past wrongs but also about building a future where public trust in governance is restored.

Still, there remains much work to be done. The Pulse Asia survey from March 2026 highlights the public's declining confidence in the justice system's ability to prosecute high-level corruption cases, with only 38% expressing trust—a 6% drop from December 2025. The survey also revealed that 54% of respondents believe government officials use influence to avoid conviction, further eroding trust in the justice system. To address these concerns, the government must implement reforms to ensure fair and evidence-based prosecution of corruption cases.

By tackling corruption head-on and fostering transparency, the administration is working to rebuild public trust, improve governance, and create a culture of accountability. These efforts are essential to sustainable development and a more equitable society.

Economic Recovery and Resilience: Translating Challenges into Opportunities

The Philippine government is driving economic recovery in 2026 by addressing inflation, unemployment, and global disruptions through strategic initiatives. Diversifying rice imports and signing free trade agreements ensure food security and stabilize supply chains, while empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) fosters inclusivity and job creation. Infrastructure development, including farm-to-market roads and airport modernization, supports long-term growth and enhances climate resilience. The National Digital Connectivity Plan aims to improve broadband access, reduce internet costs, and boost e-commerce and education. Biweekly monitoring of government projects ensures accountability and timely completion, while efforts to attract foreign investments and expand trade partnerships strengthen the economic foundation. Despite global challenges like rising oil prices and market volatility, the administration's proactive measures demonstrate a commitment to resilience and sustainable growth. By leveraging digitalization, infrastructure, and trade, the Philippines is building a robust, inclusive economy that benefits all Filipinos and positions the nation for long-term prosperity.

Infrastructure Development: Transforming Challenges into Progress

The Philippine government is prioritizing infrastructure development in 2026 to address long-standing challenges and drive economic growth. Key projects include the Metro Manila Subway, MRT-3 rehabilitation, and classroom construction, aimed at reducing traffic congestion, improving education facilities, and boosting productivity. Flood control systems, such as drainage repairs and pumping stations, are being upgraded to mitigate disaster risks and protect communities from heavy rains. Investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, including farm-to-market roads and energy security initiatives, prepare the country for environmental challenges while supporting agricultural productivity and energy stability.

Transparency and accountability are central to these efforts, with public-private partnerships ensuring inclusivity and efficiency. By aligning projects with commuter and community needs, the government fosters trust and collaboration. These initiatives not only address immediate infrastructure gaps but also create opportunities for sustainable development, positioning the Philippines as a more connected, disaster-ready, and economically resilient nation.

Political Dynamics and Stability: Navigating Challenges to Strengthen Governance

The Philippine government is navigating a complex political landscape in 2026, marked by controversies, early election maneuvering, and corruption allegations. Despite these challenges, the administration is leveraging them to strengthen governance and promote unity. Investigations into corruption scandals, such as those tied to flood control projects, demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability, reinforcing institutional integrity. Political controversies, including impeachment complaints, are being managed through adherence to due process and democratic principles, showcasing resilience and fairness.

The government remains focused on advancing priority legislation and economic reforms, addressing inflation, unemployment, and growth despite political noise. Collaboration with political leaders and civil society organizations fosters unity and ensures diverse voices are heard in policymaking. By prioritizing ethical leadership and effective governance, the administration is turning challenges into opportunities to build public trust, promote stability, and drive reforms that benefit the nation, ensuring progress amidst political complexities.

Climate Change and Environmental Governance: Turning Challenges into Sustainable Solutions

The Philippine government is addressing significant environmental challenges, including climate-related risks and fragmented water governance, by promoting sustainable solutions and climate resilience. With natural disasters becoming more frequent, investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, such as flood control systems and disaster preparedness

initiatives, aim to protect vulnerable communities while fostering economic growth. Efforts to streamline water governance through new leadership in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) seek to improve resource management and ensure equitable access.

The reassignment of former Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco to a climate advisory role highlights the integration of sustainability into tourism development. On the international stage, the Philippines is leading ASEAN efforts to promote sustainable tourism and address climate challenges, enhancing its reputation as a responsible global citizen. By prioritizing environmental governance and climate action, the administration is turning risks into opportunities, creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and ensuring long-term resilience for communities and ecosystems.

Public Engagement and Accountability: Building Trust and Empowering Communities

In 2026, the Philippine government is actively addressing public concerns and fostering accountability to rebuild trust and empower communities. Amid political controversies and corruption allegations, such as those tied to flood control projects, the administration has intensified investigations, partnered with civil society organizations, and implemented stricter monitoring mechanisms. These actions demonstrate a commitment to ethical governance and transparency, aiming to restore public confidence.

Economic issues remain a top priority for Filipinos, with 41% identifying affordable food prices as the most pressing concern, followed by reducing corruption (26%) and creating jobs (24%). Regional disparities highlight the need for targeted policies, such as addressing inflation and food security in Balance Luzon and job creation in Mindanao. Initiatives like the “*Trabaho at Negosyo*” program aim to create jobs and support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), empowering communities and fostering economic inclusivity.

Table 3
 Actions National Government Leaders Must Primarily Do
 to Address Local Community Concerns
 In Percent / Single Answer Only: **PHILIPPINES**
 (February 27 - March 2, 2026)



PulseAsia
 RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%								
In your opinion, what should national government leaders primarily do to address the concerns in your local community? Please choose one answer only.	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Have more affordable food prices in your area such as rice, meat, fish	41	33	46	26	46	38	41	40
Lessen or eliminate corruption to provide better services to the community	26	31	30	23	16	30	26	17
Create more jobs and livelihood opportunities	24	23	14	43	28	18	24	30
Provide accessible education and healthcare services	10	13	10	8	10	14	9	13

The government is also prioritizing the welfare of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) by providing repatriation assistance and free communication services amid the Middle East conflict. Public-private partnerships are being leveraged to improve infrastructure, education, and digital connectivity, while information campaigns celebrate local craftsmanship and promote national pride.

By addressing corruption, empowering communities, and prioritizing transparency, the administration is fostering collaboration and inclusivity. These efforts aim to strengthen the relationship between the government and citizens, ensuring sustainable development and national progress. Through decisive actions and community engagement, the government is building a foundation of trust and collaboration to drive growth and resilience across the nation.

As the Philippine government strengthens public trust through transparency and community empowerment, it is also addressing the evolving challenges of the digital age. With the rapid expansion of online platforms, safeguarding citizens from financial exploitation, cybercrime, and privacy breaches has become a critical priority, ensuring that public welfare extends into the realm of consumer protection and cybersecurity.

Consumer Protection and Cybersecurity: Safeguarding Citizens in the Digital Age

The Philippine government is tackling growing risks in consumer protection and cybersecurity as digital platforms expand, exposing citizens to financial exploitation, cybercrime, and privacy breaches. Predatory practices by illegal online lending apps have caused financial distress, particularly in low-income communities. In response, the government has implemented stricter regulations and penalties to protect consumers and foster a more ethical financial system.

Cybercrime, including hacking, identity theft, and online scams, is being addressed through enhanced law enforcement capabilities, public awareness campaigns, and investments in advanced technologies to detect and prevent threats. Efforts to improve digital literacy empower citizens to navigate the online world safely and responsibly, fostering resilience against cyber threats.

These measures demonstrate the government's commitment to public welfare and accountability, creating a safer digital environment for individuals and businesses. By prioritizing cybersecurity and consumer protection, the Philippines is building trust and positioning itself as a leader in regional digital security.

Turning Challenges into Opportunities for National Progress

The governance trends in the Philippines during the first quarter of 2026 reflect a nation at a crossroads, facing complex challenges while striving to seize opportunities for growth and development. From political tensions to economic uncertainties, the administration has encountered hurdles that could undermine progress. However, by adopting a proactive and strategic approach, the government is transforming these risks into stepping stones for a brighter future.

One of the most significant challenges has been navigating political controversies, including impeachment proceedings and criticism from key figures. While these issues could destabilize the administration, they also present an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability. By addressing allegations head-on and fostering open dialogue, the government can strengthen public trust and reinforce democratic values.

Economic resilience remains a critical focus, especially amid global disruptions like the Middle East conflict and rising oil prices. These challenges have tested the country's ability to adapt and innovate. Yet, the administration's efforts to explore alternative oil sources, promote energy conservation, and fast-track legislative solutions highlight its determination to protect the economy and the livelihoods of Filipinos. Initiatives like the "*Trabaho at Negosyo*" program and support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) further underscore the government's commitment to inclusive growth.

The Philippines' leadership in ASEAN and its bid for a UN Security Council seat reflect its ambition to play a more prominent role on the global stage. While balancing relations with major powers like the US and China is a delicate task, the government's focus on regional cooperation and peace advocacy showcases its ability to navigate complex international dynamics. These efforts not only enhance the country's global standing but also create opportunities for economic partnerships and security collaboration.

On the domestic front, the administration's emphasis on infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and disaster preparedness demonstrates a clear focus on improving the quality of life for Filipinos. By prioritizing transparency, sustainability, and public engagement, the government is fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among its citizens.

In summary, while the Philippines faces significant risks in governance, the administration's proactive measures and strategic initiatives are turning these challenges into opportunities for progress. By addressing corruption, strengthening institutions, and prioritizing the welfare of its people, the government is laying the groundwork for a more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous nation. The road ahead may be complex, but with determination and collaboration, the Philippines is poised to overcome obstacles and achieve lasting growth.

II. CHARTING THE INDO-PACIFIC: THE PHILIPPINES' PATH TO REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE

The Indo-Pacific region is a global hub for trade, security, and economic growth, yet it faces mounting challenges, including geopolitical tensions, economic constraints, and growing threats to territorial integrity. As a rising middle power strategically located along vital maritime routes, the Philippines plays a crucial role in ensuring regional stability. In 2026, the urgency for geostrategic action has intensified, requiring the Philippines to simultaneously advance its national priorities and broader international commitments by strengthening alliances, safeguarding maritime security, and promoting economic resilience to position itself as a regional leader.

Key Geostrategic Challenges

The Philippines faces significant geostrategic challenges arising from developments in the Indo-Pacific region and within its own maritime domain. Critical waterways such as the West Philippine Sea and the Strait of Hormuz have been particularly vulnerable this quarter, as escalating geopolitical conflicts heighten risks to energy security and disrupt vital supply chains. On top of these, China's expansionist actions continue to undermine the rules-based international order and challenge Philippine sovereignty. Despite these pressures, the Philippines is well-positioned to contribute to regional stability by strengthening cooperation with like-minded states and advancing peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

Strengthening Defense Cooperation

On March 26, the Philippines and France signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), marking a significant milestone in the country's defense and security strategy. This signing represents the Philippines' first such agreement with a European partner and underscores Manila's ongoing efforts to diversify its security partnerships and build a more credible and resilient defense posture amid a rapidly evolving regional security environment.

As maritime nations, the Philippines and France share common strategic interests in safeguarding sea lanes, upholding freedom of navigation, and protecting vital marine resources. The agreement provides a legal framework for deeper military engagement, enabling the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the French Armed Forces to expand joint activities, including naval exercises and maritime security operations. The VFA shows the Philippines' commitment to working with more partners who support international rules, especially as tensions with China rise in the West Philippine Sea and Indo-Pacific.

Maritime Cooperative Activities (MCAs)

Aside from institutionalizing defense cooperation through formal agreements, the Philippines has continued to strengthen its defense posture through a series of Maritime Cooperative Activities (MCAs) conducted this quarter with key allies and partners. These include the Philippine–U.S. Bilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity on January 25, the 14th Philippines–Australia–U.S. Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity on February 15–16, the 15th Philippines–Japan–U.S. Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity on February 26, and another Philippine–U.S. Bilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity on March 6.

These engagements highlight the growing depth and frequency of defense cooperation between the Philippines and like-minded partners committed to regional security. These exercises enhance interoperability, improve maritime domain awareness, and strengthen the operational readiness of participating forces to respond to real-world contingencies. More importantly, they send a clear and consistent signal: the Philippines is not alone in upholding a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, as it continues to work alongside trusted partners to safeguard regional stability and security.

This strategic direction is clearly aligned with public sentiment. Survey shows that Filipinos place the highest trust in like-minded partners, with the United States (70%), Japan (46%), and Australia (37%) emerging as the top choices.

Table 4
Most Trusted Entity to Work with the Philippines in Defending its Rights and Upholding International Law in the West Philippine Sea
In Percent / Multiple Responses, Up to 3 allowed: **PHILIPPINES**
(February 27 – March 2, 2026)

PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%

	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Which of the following do you trust most to work with the Philippines in defending the Philippines' rights and upholding international law in the West Philippine Sea? You may choose up to three. You may mention others not included in the list.								
United States	70	74	80	52	60	77	68	66
Japan	46	51	45	43	46	51	44	47
Australia	37	34	40	31	38	29	39	36
Canada	26	26	23	34	23	21	26	30
ASEAN as an organization	24	21	23	32	22	31	23	16
South Korea	20	19	21	22	16	20	20	17
Russia	19	22	14	26	19	15	20	14
United Kingdom (UK) / Great Britain	16	14	16	13	21	15	16	23
Germany	13	7	13	20	11	22	11	14
Taiwan	6	4	8	4	5	2	7	8
France	5	5	4	8	5	1	5	11
India	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	4
Others	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Israel	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singapore	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UNAIDED								
Can't say / Refused / None	0.4	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Can't say	0.2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Refused	0.01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
None	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Q22. Alin-alin sa mga sumusunod ang pinaka-pinagkakatiwalaan mo na makikipagtulungan sa Pilipinas para ipaglaban ang mga karapatan ng Pilipinas at International Law sa West Philippine Sea? Maaari kayong pumili ng hanggang tatlo. Maaari rin kayong magbanggit ng wala sa listahan.

The Unseen War: Foreign Interference and Malign Influence (FIMI)

In today's digital age, the Philippines is confronting a new and evolving form of conflict—one that is not fought with ships or weapons, but through narratives, information, and perception. Foreign Interference and Malign Influence (FIMI) represents an unseen war unfolding within the information space, where manipulated data, disinformation, and coordinated influence operations are used to shape public opinion and influence national outcomes. Unlike traditional threats, this form of warfare is subtle, persistent, and difficult to detect, operating through everyday platforms and targeting citizens directly. It blurs the line between truth and falsehood, making it increasingly challenging for societies to distinguish between authentic discourse and strategically crafted narratives.

As a result, FIMI has emerged as a critical and complex challenge for the Philippines, with far-reaching implications for governance, national security, and social cohesion. Through tactics such as disinformation campaigns, cyber operations, and networked influence efforts, it seeks to erode trust in institutions, polarize public opinion, and weaken democratic resilience from within. This unseen war does not aim for immediate disruption alone, but for long-term influence—gradually reshaping perceptions, altering behavior, and creating divisions that can be exploited over time. In this context, safeguarding the Philippines is no longer limited to defending its physical territory, but also requires securing its information environment against forces that seek to destabilize it from within.

Key Mechanisms of FIMI

FIMI operates through coordinated efforts not only by foreign actors but also by domestic actors who enable a broader ecosystem to distort information and influence public behavior, often amplified through digital platforms. These operations exploit vulnerabilities in the information network, leverage artificial intelligence, utilize persuasive technologies, and exploit social media algorithms to spread disinformation and amplify strategic narratives.

Key strategies now include disinformation campaigns, misleading and emotionally provocative content, and highly reactive messaging that capitalize on geopolitical tensions—further intensified by the use of generative AI to generate fake news, synthetic images, and fabricated personas aligned with foreign interests. Persuasive technologies are harnessed to subtly influence user decisions, foster excessive doubt, and enable mass surveillance. Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become central to FIMI operations, where strategic messaging has grown boundless in scale and more pervasive across digital ecosystems through fake accounts and cyber troops.

FIMI reveals the challenge of modern conflict where targeted audiences and strategic messaging have become central battlegrounds for influence. This reflects an evolving dynamic which simultaneously attack information systems and deploy propaganda and psychological operations. These mechanisms exploit vulnerabilities within the digital ecosystem and intersect with broader forms of conflict, including cyberwarfare, political warfare, psychological warfare, legal warfare, and economic warfare.

Actors and Channels of FIMI in the Philippines

In the Philippines, a diverse cluster of both covert and overt actors operate within the FIMI landscape from associations, councils, study centers, academic exchanges, partner city agreements, media networks, and even organized crime groups. These include foreign actors who may be controlled, linked, or indirectly associated with broader geopolitical agendas.

Among these foreign actors, China has been identified as a source of influence and information manipulation activities in the region. China's United Front Work (UFW) system plays a central role in these efforts, utilizing various associations and agencies, state-linked media, and overseas Chinese community networks to advance China's strategic interests. Under this framework, organizations such as the Philippine Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China (PCPPRC) provide platforms of engagement with Filipino-Chinese business groups, chambers, and community organizations to influence pro-China narratives through forums, cultural events, and partnerships with local influencers and business networks. Academic institutions or study centers—including the Philippine-Chinese Studies Center at Diliman College and

the China Studies Center at New Era University—further serve as avenues for embedding pro-Beijing narratives through exchanges, scholarships, and policy dialogues framed as scholarly discussion.

Equally consequential, other channels intersect with this influence ecosystem, with sister-city partnerships and local elite political networks providing physical and relational access points that—while often framed as economic or cultural cooperation—can also be leveraged as tools for narrative shaping and influence. Meanwhile, organized crime networks linked to Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGOs) represent another layer of foreign-linked activity, with connections to online fraud, human trafficking, and money laundering.


Additionally, digital media networks, including China-linked disinformation networks also leverage AI-generated content, fake accounts, and coordinated messaging on social media platforms to shape public opinion and undermine trust in institutions.

Together, these interconnected actors and channels form a multilayered ecosystem that shapes, reframes, and circulates narratives aimed at influencing public perception and advancing foreign strategic interests across political, economic, socio-cultural domains.

Implications of FIMI on Philippine Governance

FIMI poses serious risks to Philippine governance by weakening institutional credibility, distorting political processes, intensifying polarization, and threatening national security. These operations often target key institutions—including the government, military, and media—to undermine public confidence and generate fear, doubt, and confusion, ultimately shaping public behavior and opinion in favor of foreign interests.

Table 5
Promoting or Supporting Any Statement from China or Any Country that Goes Against the Interests of the Philippines is a Betrayal of our Nation
In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
(February 27 – March 2, 2026)



Base: Total Interviews, 100%

AGREEMENT / DISAGREEMENT WITH TEST STATEMENT:
"Promoting or supporting any statement from China or any country that goes against the interests of the Philippines is a betrayal of our nation."

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

"Promoting or supporting any statement from China or any country that goes against the interests of the Philippines is a betrayal of our nation."

	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Agree	43	48	44	39	40	43	43	45
Very Much Agree	9	14	6	8	12	11	8	8
Somewhat Agree	34	34	38	31	28	31	34	37
Cannot say if agree or disagree	33	37	33	38	26	34	33	27
Disagree	24	14	22	24	34	24	24	28
Somewhat disagree	18	11	17	19	25	21	17	24
Very much disagree	6	3	5	5	9	2	7	3

FIMI also influences political outcomes by swaying electoral behavior and policy decisions through disinformation, amplified narratives, and indirect pressure from a misled public. These efforts not only occur several times, but they become long-term operations that eventually shape public attitudes, normalize misinformation, and create lasting fractures in social and political cohesion.

A recent survey revealed divided public opinion on whether supporting foreign statements against Philippine interests constitutes betrayal, with 43% agreeing, 24% disagreeing, and 33% undecided. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to counter FIMI, including promoting information integrity, enhancing cybersecurity, fostering public awareness, and strengthening international collaboration to protect democratic institutions and ensure societal cohesion.

Further, the referenced Pulse Asia survey assessed public opinion on the acceptability of the Chinese Embassy’s recent statements and actions toward Philippine officials, civil society organizations, and citizens. The results revealed that a majority of Filipinos (51%) found these statements and actions unacceptable, with the highest disapproval rates in Balance Luzon (65%) and NCR (60%). Across socioeconomic classes, Class ABC expressed the strongest disapproval at 57%, followed by Class D (51%) and Class E (39%).

Only 16% of respondents nationwide considered the statements and actions acceptable, with the highest acceptance rates in Visayas (30%) and Mindanao (25%). Among socioeconomic classes, Class E showed the highest acceptance at 20%, while Class ABC had the lowest at 11%. Notably, 27% of respondents were unaware of the statements, with Mindanao showing the highest percentage of unawareness at 41%. A small portion of respondents (6%) expressed uncertainty or had no opinion, with NCR showing the highest percentage of indecision at 13%.

These results indicate that a significant portion of Filipinos disapprove of the Chinese Embassy’s recent statements and actions, with regional and socioeconomic variations in levels of acceptance, awareness, and uncertainty. The findings suggest a general sentiment of disapproval, particularly in urban areas and among higher socioeconomic classes.

Table 6
 Acceptability of the Chinese Embassy’s Recent Statements and
 Actions Toward Philippine Officials, Civil Society Organizations, and Citizens
 In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
 (February 27 – March 2, 2026)



PulseAsia
 RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%								
Overall, do you consider the Chinese Embassy’s recent statements and actions toward Philippine officials, civil society organizations, and citizens acceptable or unacceptable?	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Acceptable	16	10	7	30	25	11	17	20
Unacceptable	51	60	65	34	31	57	51	39
Not aware of the statements	27	17	22	29	41	27	26	35
UNAIDED								
Not sure/No opinion	6	13	6	7	3	5	7	6
Not sure	3	2	4	2	2	2	3	3
No opinion	4	10	2	5	1	4	4	3

Table 7
Public Opinion on the Disclosure of China's Actions in the West Philippine Sea
During the Philippines' Hosting of Asean
In Percent / Single Answers Only: **PHILIPPINES**
(February 27 – March 2, 2026)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%

AGREEMENT / DISAGREEMENT WITH TEST STATEMENT:

"Some people say that because the Philippines will serve as the host and chair of ASEAN in 2026, we should tone down or be more cautious in revealing China's harassment of our vessels and fishermen in the West Philippine Sea."

	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
In your opinion, should the Philippines continue or not continue disclosing China's coercive actions against Philippine ships and fishermen in the West Philippine Sea while it is currently hosting the ASEAN?								
Should	68	75	75	45	68	76	67	63
Should not	28	15	23	49	28	20	29	34
UNAIDED								
Can't say / Refused	4	10	2	6	4	4	4	3
Can't say	4	10	2	5	4	4	4	2
Refused	0.2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Sabi ng ilan dahil Pilipinas and Host at Chair ng ASEAN sa 2026, ay dapat maghinayhinayayo sa pagsiwalat ng mga panggigipit ng China sa ating mga barko at mangingisda sa West Philippine Sea.

Q21. Sa tingin ninyo, dapat ba o hindi dapat na ipagpatuloy ng Pilipinas and pagsisiwalat nito sa mga ginagawang panggigipit ng China sa mga barko at mangingisda ng Pilipinas sa West Philippine Sea habang ito ang kasalukuyang host ng ASEAN?

Table 8
Whether Or Not The Philippines Should Continue With Its Transparency Policy In The West Philippine Sea
And Keep Exposing China's Coercion Of Filipino Vessels And Fishermen
In Percent: **PHILIPPINES**
(September 27 – 30, 2025)



PulseAsia
RESEARCH INC.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%

	RP	LOCATION				CLASS		
		NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Should the Philippines continue with its Transparency Policy in the West Philippine Sea, and keep exposing China's coercion of Filipino vessels and fishermen?								
Should	94	97	96	93	89	93	94	96
Should not	5	3	4	4	9	6	5	3
UNAIDED								
Can't say / Refused	1	0	0	3	2	0	1	1
Can't say	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	1
Refused	0.1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

A clear example of how FIMI operates can be seen in the targeting of the Philippines' transparency policy, especially in the West Philippine Sea. The first quarter saw a deliberate and sustained attack on these efforts, where narratives were shaped to cast doubt on the value of openly disclosing coercive actions in the West Philippine Sea.

This shift is reflected in public opinion. Table 7 (February–March 2026) shows that only 68% of Filipinos support continued disclosure of China's actions even as the Philippines hosts ASEAN, compared to the overwhelming 94% support recorded in Table 8 (September 2025) for maintaining transparency and exposing coercion. The sharp decline from 94% to 68% within a short span points to a clear erosion of what was once a near-unanimous national position.

Such a significant drop cannot be viewed as a simple change in sentiment. It reflects the tangible effects of sustained FIMI operations. By introducing doubt, amplifying cautionary narratives, and creating competing interpretations of national interest, these influence efforts have gradually weakened public consensus. In doing so, they demonstrate how the information space has become a critical battleground, where shaping perception can directly influence the Philippines' ability to sustain firm and unified positions on issues concerning sovereignty and national security.

Strategies to Counter FIMI

In countering FIMI, the Philippines must adopt a multifaceted strategy grounded in information integrity, robust cybersecurity, effective attribution, comprehensive legislation, public awareness and societal resilience, and strengthened international collaboration with like-minded partners.

Promoting information integrity requires a whole-of-nation defense strategy that brings together government institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society, and international partners to secure the country's information landscape in both physical and digital domains. Strengthening information integrity must be complemented by robust cybersecurity measures and the productive use of technologies such as AI, which can counter psychological warfare that exploits digital vulnerabilities while also protecting critical systems through resilient infrastructure and intelligence-sharing with global partners.

Legislative frameworks must remain updated and effective in addressing the growing complexities of foreign interference, ensuring strong transparency measures and enabling proper attribution, while also extending these safeguards to risks posed by organized crime networks such as Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGOs).

Building public awareness and societal resilience requires strengthening information and digital literacy and competencies. Collaborative fact-checking platforms and integrating media literacy into education can further support this effort. There must be a simple, sustainable, and scalable narrative that can be amplified to counter malicious narratives. This includes empowering an organized "anti-troll army" of citizens, institutions, and credible voices to actively neutralize false content while amplifying verified and trustworthy narratives to rebuild public confidence.

Collectively, strengthening partnerships with allies like the U.S., Japan, and even ASEAN is critical for joint cybersecurity exercises, intelligence sharing, and establishing global norms for information integrity. By implementing these strategies, the Philippines can build resilience against FIMI and safeguard its democratic institutions and ensure long-term security.

Toward Stability and Peace

The Philippines stands at a critical juncture in its journey toward sustainable growth, resilient governance, and regional leadership. As global challenges intensify—ranging from economic uncertainties to geopolitical tensions—the country must embrace a proactive and strategic approach to secure its future. By strengthening partnerships with trusted allies, investing in infrastructure, diversifying trade and energy sources, and prioritizing climate action, the Philippines can build a foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

The Indo-Pacific region offers immense opportunities, but it also demands vigilance and adaptability. The Philippines'

geostrategic position gives it a unique role in shaping regional security and economic cooperation. To thrive in this volatile environment, the nation must focus on inclusive governance, transparent policies, and decisive action to address pressing challenges.

With clear vision and collective effort, the Philippines can rise as a resilient middle power, safeguarding its sovereignty and contributing to a peaceful and prosperous future for the region.

III. LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND UPDATES

On February 10, 2026, the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) identified 21 priority legislation targeted for passage before the sine die adjournment of Congress on June 5, 2026. Of this number, one bill has been enacted into law while another is still pending deliberation by the Bicameral Conference Committee; two bills have been approved by the Senate and are pending at the House of Representatives; seven bills have been approved by the House and are pending in the Senate; and nine bills have yet to be approved by either chamber.

For the first quarter of 2026, both houses of Congress have approved the Bicameral Conference Committee (BiCam) Report on the bill Resetting the First Regular Elections in the BARMM. They have also designated members of the BiCam who will deliberate on the differing provisions of the Geriatric Health Act. In the same period, the Senate approved the Classroom Building Acceleration Program (CAP) Act on third and final reading and the Private Basic Education Voucher Assistance Act and the Right to Information Act on second reading. Meanwhile, the lower house approved the Travel Tax Abolition Act on third and final reading and the amendments to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Act on second reading.

Below is a summary of the Status of the Bills for easy reference:

BILL TITLE	SENATE STATUS	HOUSE STATUS
Resetting of the First Regular Elections of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	Enacted as Republic Act RA12317 on March 25, 2026	Enacted as Republic Act RA12317 on March 25, 2026
Geriatric Health Act	Pending at the Bicameral Conference Committee	Pending at the Bicameral Conference Committee
Classroom Building Acceleration Program Act	Approved on Third and Final Reading	House Committee Report Being Finalized
Citizen Access and Disclosure of Expenditures for National Accountability (CADENA) Act	Approved on Third and Final Reading	Pending at the Committee Level
Right to Information Act	Approved on Second Reading	Pending at the Committee-Technical Working Group Level
Private Basic Education Voucher Assistance	Approved on Second Reading	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Amendments to the Bank Deposits Secrecy Law / Banking Reform for Integrity, Good Governance, Honesty, and Transparency (BRIGHT) Act	Sponsored at the Plenary	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Travel Tax Abolition Act of 2026	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Strengthening The Energy Regulatory Commission	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Estate Tax Amnesty Extension Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Third and Final Reading

BILL TITLE	SENATE STATUS	HOUSE STATUS
Waste Treatment Technology Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Water Resource Management Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Third and Final Reading
Amendments to the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Approved on Second Reading
Expanded Anti-Online Sexual Abuse Act	For Interpellation	Pending at the Committee Level
Independent People's Commission Act	For Interpellation	Pending at the Committee Level
Anti-Political Dynasty Law	Pending Second Reading	Pending Second Reading
Amendments to the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Pending at the Committee Level
Amendments to the Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pilipino Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Pending at the Committee Level
Party List Reform Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Pending at the Committee Level
Fake news and Digital Disinformation Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Pending at the Committee Level
Amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law/Rice Industry and Consumer Empowerment (RICE) Act	Pending at the Committee Level	Pending at the Committee Level

The lower chamber also approved eight bills among the longer list of LEDAC priorities targeted for passage within the 20th Congress, bringing the total house-approved priorities to 17. These bills are:

1. Digital Payments Act
2. Assistance to Individuals in Crisis
3. Amending the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act
4. Amendment to the "Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act Of 1994"
5. Amendment to the "Biofuels Act"
6. Amendments to the "National Building Code"
7. Bagong Balikbayan Act
8. Blue Economy Act

Resetting the First Regular Elections in the BARMM

The Amendment to Republic Act 11054, or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), reset the schedule of the First Regular Election of the BARMM from being simultaneous with the 2022 National Elections, moving it to the Second Monday of September 2026. The succeeding elections will be set to coincide with the National Elections.

Geriatric Health Act

The measure mandates the establishment of a Philippine Geriatric Center (PGC) within five to seven years from the effectivity of the act. It that shall provide comprehensive health services for geriatric patients and establish and maintain a Geriatric Health Registry that will inform policy formulation and planning.

The 1st Regular Session of the 20th Congress resumed on January 26, 2026 and adjourned on March 21. It will remain adjourned until May 3. Session will resume on May 4 and will continue until June 5.



POLÍTIKA

CRITICAL ISSUES OF PHILIPPINE POLITY



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