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THROUGH
THE EYE OF
THE NEEDLE:
NAVIGATING REFORM
AND RISK IN THE
FOURTH YEAR OF THE
MARCOS JR.
ADMINISTRATION

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THROUGH THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE: NAVIGATING REFORM AND RISK IN THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE MARCOS JR. ADMINISTRATION

Before the penultimate year of the Marcos Jr. administration, the Philippine political landscape stood at a critical balance, shaped by the interplay of governance reforms, institutional capacity, and the evolving relationship between state and society. The significance of this period cannot be overstated: it is a time marked by both the promise of democratic consolidation and the persistent challenges of corruption, governmental volatility, and public distrust. The administration's efforts to navigate these turbulent waters amid leadership changes, legislative reforms, and mounting public scrutiny offer a revealing lens into the strengths and vulnerabilities of Philippine democracy.

Positioned at a pivotal juncture in the nation's democratic journey, the fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration has been characterized by heightened political volatility and a renewed focus on governance reforms. This period has witnessed a dynamic interplay between efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and the persistent challenges posed by corruption, leadership instability, and public skepticism. The administration's approach to reform has been shaped by both internal pressures—such as legislative turnover and shifting alliances—and external factors, including economic headwinds and evolving regional dynamics. As the government seeks to balance the imperatives of stability, accountability, and inclusive development, the choices made during this critical year will have lasting implications for the trajectory of Philippine democracy and the resilience of its institutions.

This study seeks to identify and analyze the defining characteristics of the Philippine political landscape during this pivotal year. Specifically, it aims to: (1) examine how the Marcos Jr. administration balances state power and societal control; (2) evaluate the institutional capacity and effectiveness of government; and (3) assess the impact of governance strategies and political discourse on public sentiment, legitimacy, and the prospects for democratic consolidation.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The challenge of governance lies in maintaining an equilibrium between two undesirable extremes: on one hand, an overly powerful state that risks suppressing individual liberties, and on the other, a society lacking sufficient order and cohesion, resulting in ineffective governance and policy paralysis. Effective administration requires calibrating state authority and societal participation to ensure both the protection of freedoms and the maintenance of public order.”

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) call the safe path between these extremes the “narrow corridor.” Here, the state and society keep each other in check—government is strong enough to enforce laws and deliver services, but not so powerful that it becomes oppressive. At the same time, society is active and engaged, but not so chaotic that it undermines order. This study uses the “narrow corridor” as a lens to see if the Marcos Jr. administration is walking that tightrope.

Francis Fukuyama (2004) adds another layer: it is not just about balance, but also about how well the government can actually do its job. State capacity means having the right institutions such as courts, police, schools, and agencies that work efficiently, deliver public goods, and uphold the law. In the Philippine context, this means looking at whether the government can fight corruption, respond to crises, and provide services that people need. Strong institutions are the nuts and bolts that keep the machinery of government running smoothly, even amid periods of political turbulence and complexity.

To make sense of the complex political landscape, this study uses thematic analysis. This can be more precisely articulated as an approach that identifies patterns and recurring themes across various domains like politics, government pronouncements, the economy, foreign affairs, and public commentary after the State of the Nation Address (SONA). Each of these areas is broken down into central themes and subthemes, such as leadership changes, anti-corruption reforms, economic risks, and public sentiment.

The data come from a wide range of sources: news articles, legislative reports, government documents, and public opinion surveys from July 2025 to June 2026. By weaving together these threads, the study paints a full picture of how the Marcos Jr. administration is navigating the challenges of governance, reform, and public trust.

In sum, the framework and method allow us to ask: Is the Philippines moving forward on the narrow corridor of balanced effective governance, or are old problems like corruption and instability throwing it off track?

Leadership, Stability, and Governance Dynamics

The fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration has been a period of turbulence and transformation in Philippine politics. At the heart of this landscape is the ongoing struggle to balance leadership stability, effective governance, and the demands of a vigilant society.

This section provides a comprehensive thematic analysis of Philippine politics and governance during the fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration, highlighting leadership dynamics, reform momentum, political risks, and public engagement. The analysis draws on legislative developments, controversies, and civil society responses, offering insight into the challenges and opportunities facing the country as it navigates reform and risk.

Tracking Political Stability and Leadership Dynamics

Between July 2025 and June 2026, the Philippine political leadership experienced notable instability. Senate President Francis Escudero was ousted amid corruption allegations and replaced by Senator Vicente Sotto III, who himself faced leadership challenges. At the House of Representatives, Martin Romualdez was re-elected Speaker but was succeeded by Rep. Faustino Dy III after scandals, while Rep. Ferdinand Alexander “Sandro” Marcos’s rise to Majority Leader highlighted ongoing power shifts, while early presidential race maneuvering led to impeachment complaints against both President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte exacerbated political uncertainty.

ON THE COVER

Cover, title page, and page 12:
[bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-11-24/marcos-says-seven-suspects-in-philippine-graft-scandal-detained](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-11-24/marcos-says-seven-suspects-in-philippine-graft-scandal-detained); theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/30/a-year-of-marcos-jr-how-a-dictators-son-has-changed-the-philippines; and newsinfo.inquirer.net/2107654/greenpeace-p1-trillion-lost-in-obscene-flood-control-plunder

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The Marcos Jr. administration progressed in balancing state power and societal engagement, but democratic gains remain fragile. Continued reforms, principled leadership, and stronger public participation are vital for resilient, accountable governance

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governance reforms

Despite these disruptions, governance reforms advanced. The administration established an independent commission for anti-corruption, alongside digitalization and transparency measures. Social policy reforms addressed issues like minors' social media use and drug rehabilitation. However, persistent corruption scandals, implementation bottlenecks, and divided public opinion underscored the fragility of political stability and the ongoing contest for leadership (Africa, 2025; Mateo, 2025; Tolentino, 2025; Vigilia, 2025; Servallos, 2025).

Monitoring Governance Reforms and Policy Initiatives

A closer look at the monitoring of governance reforms and policy initiatives reveals that the effectiveness of these efforts hinges not only on the breadth of reforms but also on the mechanisms for real-time oversight and adaptive management. The administration's expansion of digital platforms and open data initiatives has created new opportunities for citizen engagement in tracking government performance. However, the true test lies in how these tools are leveraged to identify implementation gaps early, facilitate inter-agency coordination, and ensure that feedback from civil society is systematically integrated into policy adjustments. This approach moves beyond compliance reporting, aiming for a dynamic process where reforms are continuously refined in response to evolving challenges and stakeholder input.

Additionally, the monitoring process has highlighted the importance of linking reform outcomes to measurable improvements in public service delivery and institutional trust. Rather than focusing solely on the passage of new laws or the launch of digital systems, evaluators are increasingly examining whether these initiatives translate into tangible benefits, such as reduced corruption incidents, faster service delivery, or increased public satisfaction. This outcome-oriented perspective encourages a shift from headline-driven reform announcements to sustained, evidence-based evaluation, fostering a culture of accountability that is essential for long-term democratic consolidation (Tolentino, 2025; Vigilia, 2025; Servallos, 2025).

Understanding Political Risks and Controversies

Corruption scandals, such as the flood control controversy and the ouster of Senate President Escudero, exposed persistent weaknesses in oversight and accountability. The impeachment of Vice President Duterte over alleged misuse of funds and unexplained wealth became a focal point, raising debates on judicial independence. International risks, including the ICC warrant for Senator dela Rosa, further complicated the political terrain (Servallos, 2026).

Gauging Reform Momentum and Policy Implementation

Congress advanced key reforms such as the National Land Use Act and expanded social protection programs, while budget transparency improved through open hearings and the removal of the "small committee." However,

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Policy signals increasingly reflect public sentiment, as civil society engagement and citizen feedback shape reforms, digital initiatives, and accountability measures, fostering a more responsive and participatory governance strategy...

”

implementation faced delays, especially in housing and disaster response, and some reforms were seen as reactive to scandals. Leadership disputes in the Senate also slowed legislative progress, though special sessions aimed to address backlogs (Ismael, 2026; Reyes, 2026).

Assessing Public Sentiment and Civil Society Engagement

Public sentiment during the fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration was sharply divided. While President Marcos' approval ratings declined, Vice President Duterte's ratings fluctuated, and only a minority trusted the Senate to judge impeachment proceedings impartially.

Civil society groups, including advocacy organizations and business and religious sectors, actively pushed for transparency, accountability, and reforms such as anti-dynasty legislation. Mass protests and campaigns for open government reflected growing public demand for genuine change and participatory governance (Mateo, 2025; Mateo, 2025b; Baron, 2025a; Stratbase Institute, 2026; Holmes, 2026).

The evolving dynamics of leadership, governance reforms, and public engagement set the stage for understanding how the Marcos Jr. administration articulates its policy direction and strategic priorities. In the next section, we examine the administration's policy signals and state strategies, exploring how official pronouncements and legislative agendas reflect and respond to the challenges outlined above.

Policy Signals and State Strategy

This section synthesizes the Philippine government's pronouncements from July 2025 to June 2026, highlighting the administration's reform trajectory and risk navigation in the fourth year of President Marcos Jr. The analysis is organized around four interlocking themes: (1) Policy Priorities and Shifts, (2) Political Opportunities and Realignments, (3) State Power and Societal Control, and (4) State Capacity and Institutional Development.

Revealing Policy Priorities and Shifts

The Marcos Jr. administration's policy agenda shifted decisively toward performance, emphasizing delivery in social protection, job creation, and education reform. Anti-corruption efforts intensified, with high-profile investigations, the creation of the Independent Commission for Infrastructure (ICI), and budget reallocations favoring social welfare and education.

Digital innovation, including AI-driven education and blockchain for budget transparency, became central to governance priorities.

These shifts were shaped by both domestic political realignments and international partnerships, with the administration recalibrating budget priorities toward human capital, disaster resilience, and institutional modernization. The focus on transparency and digitalization reflected a broader strategy to strengthen accountability and adapt to evolving political and economic challenges (Mangaluz, 2025; Geducos, 2025).

Mapping Political Opportunities and Realignments

Political opportunities emerged as the administration's reform agenda and anti-corruption drive enabled new actors to position themselves as champions of change. The creation of the ICI and the introduction of key legislative proposals, such as the Anti-Dynasty and Party-list System Reform Acts, signaled a shift toward institutional renewal and coalition-building. Although these bills have not yet been enacted into law, their advancement in the legislative process reflects ongoing efforts to reshape political institutions. Internationally, the Philippines strengthened alliances and assumed a more assertive role in regional security and economic cooperation. Domestically, impeachment proceedings, cabinet reshuffles, and legislative-executive tensions reflected ongoing realignments and factionalism. These shifts, shaped by both internal and external pressures, continue to redefine political alliances and strategies, underscoring the fluidity of the current landscape.

Domestically, impeachment proceedings, cabinet reshuffles, and legislative-executive tensions reflected ongoing realignments and factionalism. These shifts, shaped by both internal and external pressures, redefined political alliances and strategies, underscoring the fluidity of the current landscape (Mangaluz, 2025).

Understanding State Power and Societal Control

The administration exercised strong executive authority through emergency powers, regulatory interventions, and budgetary controls, notably declaring a national energy emergency and imposing price controls to address economic shocks. Anti-patronage measures, such as barring politicians from distributing aid, aimed to reduce the use of state resources for personal or political gain.

Institutional checks and balances were reinforced by the Supreme Court's rulings on impeachment and the expansion of transparency portals, which encouraged citizen monitoring of government projects. These efforts sought

to recalibrate state-society relations and promote accountability without undermining civil liberties.

Societal participation was further enabled through public reporting mechanisms and the affirmation of the right to peaceful assembly, even as the government justified security measures for rallies. This balance between state power and societal control reflected an ongoing effort to maintain order while fostering civic engagement.

Assessing State Capacity and Institutional Development

Recent years have seen the Philippine government pursue a multifaceted agenda to enhance institutional effectiveness and public service delivery. Investments in digital infrastructure, technical-vocational education, and merit-based scholarship programs have been prioritized to modernize core state functions. Efforts to upgrade the military, police, and disaster response systems, alongside the construction of new health and education facilities, reflect a commitment to strengthening the operational capacity of government agencies. These initiatives are complemented by policy coherence measures, such as biweekly project monitoring and integrated digital platforms, which aim to improve coordination and accountability across sectors. Despite these advances, persistent challenges—including inflation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political contestation—continue to test the resilience and adaptability of Philippine institutions.

Policy coherence improved via biweekly project monitoring, stricter reporting, and integrated digital platforms for public services. The “Whole-of-Nation

PLUS” approach promoted cross-sector coordination for sustainable development and climate action.

Despite these gains, inflation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and political contestation continued to challenge institutional reforms. The administration’s ability to mobilize resources and coordinate complex initiatives reflected gradual improvements in administrative competence.

The evolving landscape of policy pronouncements and strategic realignments underscores the administration’s ongoing efforts to balance reform momentum with institutional resilience. Building on these signals, the next section delves into the economic governance and organizational capability that underpin the government’s ability to translate policy intent into tangible outcomes.

Economic Governance and Institutional Capacity

The period spanning July 2025 to June 2026 under President Marcos Jr. was marked by a complex interplay of reform initiatives, governance challenges, and external shocks. This thematic analysis examines the Philippine economy through four key lenses: governance strengths and weaknesses, political opportunities and risks, state-society relations, and governance capacity. The analysis draws on a wide range of news reports, expert commentary, and policy documents to provide a nuanced understanding of the country’s economic trajectory during this period.

Governance Strengths and Weaknesses

The administration’s strengths included a strong commitment to transparency and digitalization, as discussed in the section “Leadership, Stability, and Governance Dynamics”. Efforts to promote inclusive growth, food security, and public service delivery led to gains in poverty reduction and employment, while digital platforms enhanced procurement oversight and reduced corruption.

However, persistent corruption, political instability, and weak trade negotiation leverage exposed governance vulnerabilities. The abolition of key anti-corruption bodies, lack of transparency in major funds, and high-profile scandals slowed government spending and economic growth. Concerns also grew over the impact of tariff concessions on local industries and the risks posed by external shocks (Campos, 2025; DEPDev, 2025; Ordinario, 2025; Africa, 2025; Guinigundo & Mañalac, 2025; Beech, 2025; Baron, 2025).

Political Opportunities and Risks

The administration leveraged international partnerships and legislative endorsements to pursue economic opportunities, such as negotiating tariff reductions and attracting foreign investment in key sectors. Business groups’ support for structural reforms and the passage of priority economic measures reflected optimism for unlocking growth potential.

However, these opportunities were tempered by significant risks. The US-

Philippines tariff deal raised concerns about increased import competition and threats to local industries, while persistent leadership uncertainty and global trade tensions continued to challenge economic progress and investor confidence (Tay, 2025; Ordinario, 2025; Africa, 2025; Beech, 2025).

State-Society Relations and Power Balance

State-society relations were shaped by active engagement from civil society and business groups, which advocated for anti-corruption reforms and greater transparency. The government responded with participatory governance initiatives to build public trust and increase societal oversight.

Despite these efforts, public concerns over job security, health, and social equity persisted, with many citizens demanding more secure employment and robust social safety nets. The rise in part-time work and ongoing protests reflected continued challenges in labor relations and social inclusion.

The administration’s anti-corruption drive increased state oversight but also led to delays and underspending, fueling frustration and calls for more consultative, less burdensome regulation. The recurring spectacle of corruption scandals underscored the need for accountability and effective leadership (Campos, 2025; DEPDev, 2025; Baron, 2025).

State Capacity and Institutional Development

The Philippine government has prioritized targeted investments

and institutional reforms to address longstanding gaps in public service delivery and administrative efficiency. Recent initiatives have focused on expanding digital infrastructure, modernizing technical-vocational education, and enhancing merit-based scholarship programs to build a more capable workforce. Parallel efforts to upgrade the military, police, and disaster response systems, as well as the construction of new health and education facilities, underscore a commitment to strengthening the operational capacity of state agencies. These reforms are supported by improved project monitoring, integrated digital platforms, and cross-sector coordination under the ‘Whole-of-Nation PLUS’ approach (DepDev, 2025). Despite these advances, persistent inflation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and political contestation continue to test the resilience and adaptability of Philippine institutions.

Policy coherence improved through biweekly project monitoring, stricter reporting, and integrated digital platforms for public services. The “Whole-of-Nation PLUS” approach fostered cross-sector coordination for sustainable development and climate action. Despite these, inflation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and political contestation continued to challenge preventive reforms.

The ongoing efforts to strengthen economic governance and institutional capacity highlight both the progress and persistent challenges facing the Philippine government. Building on these developments, the next section explores how international governance and geostrategic leadership shape the country’s position in a rapidly changing regional and global environment.

International Governance and Geostrategic Leadership

The year after the middle term of the President Marcos Jr.’s administration marked a period of assertive yet pragmatic foreign policy, shaped by evolving geopolitical realities, domestic imperatives, and the administration’s drive for institutional reform. This thematic analysis synthesizes developments in Philippine foreign affairs from July 2025 to June 2026, highlighting five interrelated themes: policy priorities and leadership style, political opportunities and constraints, state capacity and institutional development, and public sentiment and political legitimacy.

Mapping Policy Priorities and Leadership Style

President Marcos Jr. prioritized national sovereignty, defense modernization, and pragmatic diplomacy, blending assertiveness with measured engagement. The administration advanced economic diplomacy through free trade agreements and international summits, while the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) professionalized recruitment and championed overseas Filipino workers’ welfare.

Leadership style emphasized balancing relations with traditional allies and cultivating new partnerships, leveraging multilateral forums to promote digitalization, climate resilience, and infrastructure. These efforts were shaped by both external pressures and internal debates over trade fairness and institutional reform (Reyes, 2026).

Understanding Political Opportunities and Constraints

The Philippines expanded its international engagement by seeking a United Nations Security Council seat, deepening ties with ASEAN and other partners, and negotiating new labor and economic agreements. Multilateral forums and bilateral deals opened opportunities for broader diplomatic influence and employment for Filipinos.

However, these opportunities were constrained by external pressures, notably China’s assertiveness in the West Philippine Sea, and internal debates over trade fairness and institutional vulnerabilities. Corruption scandals and reputational risks also limited the administration’s ability to fully capitalize on new partnerships and policy space (Reyes, 2026).

Institutional Modernization and State Capacity in Foreign Affairs

The Marcos Jr. administration prioritized institutional modernization in foreign affairs by expanding digital consular services, improving crisis response, and enhancing visa processing. The DMW digitized contract verification and intensified efforts against illegal recruitment, while defense modernization focused on joint exercises and interoperability with allies to strengthen operational readiness.

Reforms also included partnerships for maritime safety, the launch of e-Apostille systems, and expanded support for overseas Filipino workers through new reintegration programs and housing loan exemptions. These initiatives aimed to boost state

capacity, adapt to evolving global challenges, and reinforce the Philippines' diplomatic and security posture (Medenilla, 2026; Lee-Brago, 2026; Naval, 2026; Iglesias, 2026; Rocamora, 2026; Araja, 2026; Alcober, 2026).

Capturing Public Sentiment and Political Legitimacy

To more effectively capture public sentiment and political legitimacy, it is essential to move beyond traditional opinion polling and incorporate a wider array of participatory and qualitative methods. Digital platforms, for example, can be harnessed to facilitate real-time feedback loops between citizens and policymakers, allowing for the aggregation of grassroots perspectives on pressing issues. Social listening tools and sentiment analysis of online discourse can reveal nuanced shifts in public mood, while structured citizen panels and deliberative forums provide deeper insights into the motivations and concerns driving public opinion. These approaches not only broaden the evidence base for understanding legitimacy but also empower citizens to play a more active role in shaping governance outcomes.

Furthermore, legitimacy is best assessed by examining the alignment between government actions and the lived experiences of diverse communities. This requires disaggregating sentiment data by region, sector, and demographic group to identify gaps between official narratives and on-the-ground realities. Regularly publishing transparent, accessible reports on how public input influences policy decisions can strengthen trust and demonstrate responsiveness. By embedding these practices into the governance process, the administration can foster a more inclusive and adaptive model of legitimacy—one that is resilient to polarization and capable of sustaining democratic consolidation over

time (Khonghun, 2026; Jordan, 2026; Stratbase Institute, 2026; Holmes, 2026).

Political Discourse and Public Commentary

In the period following the SONA of July 2026, the Marcos Jr. administration has been a crucible for Philippine democracy, marked by intense political discourse, public scrutiny, and a renewed push for systemic reform. The Stratbase Institute's Post-SONA Forum in July 2026, with thought leadership from Prof. Victor Andres Manhit, crystallized the central theme: safeguarding democracy through systemic governance reforms and inclusive citizen engagement in the digital age (Stratbase Institute, 2026).

Contextualizing Political Events and Power Struggles

Recent political events were marked by rapid Senate leadership changes, impeachment proceedings against the Vice President, and the collapse of major alliances, all of which intensified power struggles and uncertainty. These developments exposed persistent institutional weaknesses, as corruption scandals and disputes over committee control undermined accountability and public trust. Mass protests and civil society demands for transparency further highlighted the ongoing contest for legitimacy and reform in Philippine politics (Servillos, 2026; Africa, 2026; Philstar.com, 2026; Tolentino, 2026; Wong, 2026; Holmes, 2026).

Exposing Institutional Weaknesses and Corruption

A deeper analysis of institutional weaknesses and corruption reveals that piecemeal investigations and reactive oversight mechanisms are insufficient to address systemic vulnerabilities. The persistence of high-profile scandals, despite the existence of formal accountability bodies, suggests that entrenched interests and gaps in enforcement continue to undermine reform efforts. Sustainable progress requires shifting from episodic probes to institutionalizing preventive controls. Only by embedding transparency and accountability into the daily operations of government can the cycle of corruption be disrupted and public trust gradually restored.

Reflecting and Shaping Public Sentiment

Public sentiment was sharply divided, with surveys showing support for impeachment efforts but skepticism about impartiality in official proceedings. Mass protests and advocacy campaigns by civil society and youth groups demanded greater transparency and accountability, while business and religious organizations joined calls for urgent reforms. These collective

actions both reflected and shaped the evolving expectations for government responsiveness and integrity (Magno, 2026; Mateo, 2025).

Critiquing Policy and Governance

The Stratbase Institute's Post-SONA Forum became a focal point for critiquing policy and governance. Prof. Manhit emphasized that open government and institutionalized transparency are foundational for public trust and democracy. He highlighted the evolution of Democracy Watch from election transparency to broader governance initiatives, advocating for citizen participation and digital innovation (Stratbase Institute, 2026). Initiatives like the DBM Compass and Project DIME were showcased as digital transparency tools that empower citizens to track public spending and validate infrastructure projects (Wong, 2026). The forum also called for the full implementation of open contracting, whistleblower protection, and expanded citizen participatory auditing. However, panelists warned that reforms often stall due to entrenched interests, patronage politics, and the lack of genuine political will (Teehankee, 2026).

Tracking Political Realignments and Future Prospects

Political realignments accelerated as legislative productivity was hampered by leadership disputes and fallout from corruption scandals, while momentum for anti-dynasty laws and campaign finance reform grew. The digital landscape amplified both access to information and misinformation, shaping public opinion and complicating future prospects for reform and stability (Philstar.com, 2026; Tolentino, 2026; Holmes, 2026).

Information Integrity and Digital Literacy

Prof. Manhit and Dr. Ronald Holmes, president of Pulse Asia Research Inc., highlighted the shift to digital news consumption and the urgent need for investments in digital literacy and fact-checking. The forum stressed that while most Filipinos seek third-party verification for news, political action remains limited by time constraints and competing priorities. The challenge is to harness digital tools for transparency and participation, while safeguarding against the corrosive effects of misinformation (Stratbase Institute, 2026; Wong, 2026).

The vibrant and often polarized political discourse, coupled with persistent calls for transparency and reform, has both reflected and shaped the evolving landscape of governance in the Philippines. With these dynamics in mind, the next section synthesizes the key themes and insights from the preceding analysis to provide a comprehensive discussion of the country's governance trajectory under the Marcos Jr. administration.

Synthesis and Discussion

The fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration underscores that the Philippines is navigating a delicate intersection of reform momentum and persistent governance risks. Rather than focusing on the specific leadership changes and controversies already detailed, it is more insightful to examine the broader implications for democratic consolidation and institutional resilience. The recurring cycle of corruption scandals and institutional fragility reveals the limitations of reactive governance and highlights the need for systemic, preventive reforms. Initiatives such as digitalization and open government platforms show promise, but their effectiveness depends on consistent implementation insulated from political interference.

A key lesson from this period is the importance of balancing strong executive action with meaningful societal engagement. While decisive leadership can drive reforms, excessive centralization risks alienating civil society and undermining legitimacy. Participatory governance—through public consultations, civil society oversight, and digital engagement—emerges as a critical factor in enhancing accountability and resilience, especially during times of political turbulence.

Institutional capacity remains the foundation for sustainable reform. Efforts to modernize procurement, streamline crisis response, and professionalize the bureaucracy are positive steps, but persistent implementation bottlenecks and politicization of oversight bodies threaten to erode these gains. The current political environment, with its mix of risks and opportunities, offers a window for advancing reforms such as anti-dynasty laws, campaign finance regulation, and party system professionalization. Realigning incentives to reward competence and integrity, rather than loyalty or name



recognition, is essential for long-term democratic progress.

Finally, the rise of digital platforms has democratized access to information but also amplified misinformation and polarization. Investments in digital literacy, fact-checking, and information integrity are now as important as traditional governance reforms. Harnessing technology for transparency and citizen participation, while safeguarding against its risks, will shape the future of Philippine democracy. Ultimately, the experience of this period demonstrates that genuine reform is achieved not through episodic responses to crisis, but through the steady cultivation of accountable institutions, inclusive leadership, and an engaged citizenry.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify and analyze the defining characteristics of the Philippine political landscape in the fourth year of the Marcos Jr. administration, guided by Acemoglu & Robinson’s “narrow corridor” and Fukuyama’s state capacity frameworks. Through a thematic analysis of politics and governance, government pronouncements, the economy, foreign affairs, and post-SONA public commentary, several key findings emerged.

The Marcos Jr. administration has made progress in navigating the “narrow corridor” by balancing state power and societal engagement, but the equilibrium remains fragile. Institutional capacity has improved in areas such as digitalization and crisis response, but deeper reforms are needed to address entrenched corruption, political dynasties, and information integrity. Public sentiment

remains divided, with civil society and business groups demanding more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance.

Policy Recommendations: Calibrating the Political Landscape Toward 2028

Where the current state of leadership, stability, and governance dynamics is characterized by instability, frequent power shifts, and fragile alliances which have undermined institutional credibility; and where civil society has shown capacity to drive reform, but mechanisms for sustained engagement remain weak, the following actions are imperative:

1. Institutionalize leadership succession planning: Mandate transparent, merit-based criteria for legislative and executive leadership transitions. Establish a bipartisan council to oversee succession protocols and minimize destabilizing power struggles.
2. Embed citizen representation in oversight bodies: Require citizen representatives on procurement boards and policy-making bodies, with authority to publish minority reports and trigger independent investigations. This ensures public oversight is substantive, not symbolic.
3. Strengthen political party reform: Pass legislation to professionalize party systems, enforce internal democracy, and reduce personality-driven politics. This will help cultivate reform-minded, service-oriented leaders for 2028 and beyond.

Where policy signals and state strategy are comprised of ambitious but often reactive policy pronouncements, driven

by scandals or crises; and the uneven implementation of digitalization and transparency priorities, there exists the urgency to:

1. Institutionalize forward-looking policy reviews: Establish regular, independent assessments of policy priorities to anticipate risks and adapt strategies proactively.
2. Mandate real-time project transparency: Require all major government projects to provide live, accessible updates on progress, budgets, and outcomes for public scrutiny.
3. Embed open government standards in law: Pass legislation that guarantees public access to information and participatory budgeting as permanent governance features.

Where progress in digital procurement and fiscal management is offset by persistent corruption, slow reform execution, and fiscal constraints, and where public trust and investor confidence remain fragile, strengthening economic governance and institutional capacity highlights the need to:

1. Enhance predictable regulatory environment: Streamline regulations and reduce bureaucratic delays to foster a stable climate for investment and business growth.
2. Prioritize skills development and innovation: Expand technical-vocational training and support for research partnerships to address workforce gaps and boost productivity
3. Strengthen outcome-based project monitoring: Implement regular, transparent reviews of major public

projects, focusing on measurable results and timely delivery.

Where the current state of international governance and geostrategic leadership is defined by assertive, alliance-driven foreign policy which has reinforced legitimacy but faces constraints from external shocks and domestic criticism, and where the public strongly supports sovereignty and multilateralism, we need to:

1. Institutionalize strategic foreign policy reviews: Mandate annual, multi-stakeholder reviews of foreign policy priorities, involving civil society, business, and security experts to ensure alignment with national interests and public sentiment.
2. Expand civilian engagement in geostrategic Initiatives: Formalize partnerships with civil society (e.g., Atin Ito Coalition) for sovereignty assertion, humanitarian missions, and public education on international law
3. Modernize crisis response for OFWs: Digitize and streamline inter-agency coordination for the welfare of overseas Filipinos, ensuring rapid response and reintegration support during international crises

And, where political discourse and public commentary is vibrant but polarized, with digital platforms amplifying both transparency and misinformation and the public demand for accountability is high but digital literacy gaps persist, there is the urgent call to:

1. Promote deliberative public forums and media pluralism: Establish regular, independently moderated public forums—both online and offline—that bring together diverse stakeholders

(youth, civil society, business, media, and government) to debate key policy issues. Encourage media pluralism by supporting independent journalism and community media initiatives, ensuring a wider range of perspectives in public discourse

2. Strengthen information integrity and digital citizenship: Develop a national framework for information integrity that goes beyond fact-checking apps. This should include partnerships with educational institutions to integrate digital citizenship, critical thinking, and media literacy into curricula at all levels, and support for research on the impact of disinformation and polarization on democratic participation

3. Institutionalize transparent feedback loops between citizens and policymakers: Require all major government agencies to publish regular, accessible summaries of how public input—gathered through consultations, online platforms, and citizen panels—has influenced policy decisions. This transparency will help close the gap between citizen voice and government action, fostering greater trust and accountability in the policymaking process

The success of the measures adopted from the recommendations outlined in this report depends fundamentally on the presence of political leaders who not only understand but are genuinely committed to the principles of transparency, accountability, participatory governance, and institutional reform. Leaders who embody these values are essential to breaking the cycle of reactive, personality-driven politics and to ensuring that reforms such as open government practices, citizen-led oversight, and digital transparency are implemented consistently and insulated from vested interests.

As the Philippines approaches a critical juncture in 2028, the cultivation of such principled leadership will be vital to restoring public trust, strengthening democratic institutions, and building a resilient political landscape capable of navigating both persistent risks and emerging opportunities.

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