

Son of Late Dictator Sustains Lead in Surveys. The Philippines in the Next Six Years

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May 7 marks the last day of the campaign period. Presidential and vice-presidential candidates held the last round of their nationwide campaign rallies to secure votes for the May 9 elections. Of the ten presidential candidates, one man consistently leads in surveys: son of the late dictator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (BBM).

BBM gained popularity largely due to his (in)famous father and namesake, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., who ruled the Philippines from 1965-1986 under a dictatorship and placed the country under almost a decade of martial law, starting a year before the end of his second term in 1973. From 1972 until his ouster by People Power in 1986, the Marcos regime oversaw at least [11, 103](#) victims of [human rights violations](#). His clan also amassed an ill-gotten wealth amounting to PHP299B, of which [PHP174B](#) has been recovered while the remaining PHP125B is yet to be returned.

But these historical facts were later on subject to modification as orchestrated by BBM himself through the expertise of [Cambridge Analytica](#). By rebranding the family image on social media coupled with myth-making, accounts of the country’s worst case of corruption and disregard for human rights are essentially downplayed. Many people are buying this electoral propaganda which is being perpetuated on Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube by an army of trolls allegedly paid by the Marcos camp.



Screenshot from the [Human Rights Victims' Claims Board](#)

Besides being a direct descendant of the now-admired and celebrated Marcos Sr., BBM is closely linked to outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte whose authoritarian characteristics have been inspired by the late dictator. Trial awaits the incumbent president for extra-judicial killings resulting from his war on drugs. Like his political inspiration Marcos Sr., Duterte, by virtue of the concept of political incorporation, purged from society the “rotten apples” of the Filipino population, i.e. small-time drug dealers and rival drug lords. The strongman rule is also marked by excessive military and police authority which bolstered police brutality and killings in the last six years. Moreover, the US-Philippine relations is at its worst as Duterte pursued a flawed “independent” foreign policy which basically only entails realignment to China and Russia. Apparently, he has not directly endorsed a successor but insinuated support for BBM through the endorsement from his political party, PDP-Laban, of which he is a chairman.

BBM’s electoral ploy such as non-attendance in almost all presidential debates, refusal of media interviews, utilization of fake news and historical revisionism is characteristic of authoritarianism where accountability is nonexistent. A new era of corruption, reminiscent of the 70’s, is imminent. And by viewing a BBM presidency as an extension of the Duterte regime, supporters commit to another six years of strongman rule that threatens further democratic backsliding and marginalization of the poor and indigenous groups. Hostility towards the West is foreseeable given his ideological affiliation and unpleasant history with the US. Disengagement from the hegemon essentially resonates with many Filipinos who criticize its cold war mentality and warmongering activities. Consequently, his supporters welcome his expression of intent to continue Duterte’s pivot to China; but too much comfort will be detrimental to the Philippines’ claim in the South China Sea.

Much is at stake with a Marcos in power. The Philippines cannot afford a 70’s redux. But man can only do so much. May 9 will determine the trajectory of the country and its population.

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