

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. wins Philippine presidential election

Joseph Scalice
9 May 2022

The results of the election staged on Monday in the Philippines are still being tabulated, but nearly all precincts have now reported, and it is clear that Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the country's former dictator, has been elected president with a substantial lead over his nearest rival.

Over 50 million people queued in the scorching heat to cast their ballots. Problems with polling machines meant that many had to stand for four or more hours in line order to vote. There were reports of election violence and broken voting machines, but no more than is standard for national elections in the country.

Partial results from the Commission on Elections (Comelec), with 93 percent of precincts reporting show Marcos receiving 29.8 million votes. His nearest rival, current Vice President Leni Robredo, has 14.2 million votes, while the third, boxer-turned-senator Manny Pacquiao, trails with a distant 3.3 million.

The president and vice president are voted for separately in the Philippines, and Marcos' running mate, Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of the current president, Rodrigo Duterte, is on track to win by an even larger margin. She currently has 30.1 million votes to the 8.8 million of her leading competitor, Kiko Pangilinan, running mate of Robredo.

The senatorial slate of Marcos and allied political forces is poised to secure a substantial majority of the 12 available seats. It is too soon to tell, but it appears possible that as many as three of Robredo's candidates will win seats. Among those assured of Senate seats are movie star and right-wing populist, Robin Padilla, and the fascistic shock radio journalist Raffy Tulfo.

The top vote-getter among party-list organizations competing for seats in Congress, with over 2 million votes, twice as many as any other party, is ACT-CIS (Anti-Crime and Terrorism through Communist Involvement and Support). ACT-CIS is a fascistic party, associated with the Tulfo family, that was founded by former police chiefs. It is dedicated to creating anticommunist vigilante organizations with government funding.

The Duterte Youth—an organization deliberately modeled after the Hitler Youth organization with black uniforms, red armbands and the Duterte raised-fist fascist salute, advocating violent anticommunism and mandatory military training—received over 500,000 votes. Its election statement in the 2019 election, when it received 350,000 votes, warned allegedly “communist” youth that “We will finish you in the streets along with your rapist, criminal and terrorist comrades.”

The outcome of the 2022 election in the Philippines represents an unqualified victory for the most reactionary forces in Philippine politics.

What does a Marcos presidency bode?

First, in terms of geopolitics, Marcos has explicitly stated his intention of continuing the policies of the outgoing Duterte administration of improving diplomatic and trade relations with Beijing. This strategy runs afoul of Washington's openly bellicose moves against China and has placed Manila largely outside the geostrategic ambit of its former colonial ruler.

In 2016, as Duterte took office, the outgoing Benigno Aquino III

administration had concluded a deal with Washington, known as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement that effectively returned US military bases to the country after a more than 20-year absence. The ruling handed down by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in The Hague, invalidating much of China's claim to the South China Sea, was poised to be a weapon in the hands of a US proxy to increase pressure on China.

Duterte's geopolitical reorientation meant that these prepared weapons were removed from Washington's hands for six years. Marcos' election consolidates Washington's diminishing hold over its former colony.

This is expressed in the alignment of ruling class forces behind Marcos' candidacy. The political kingmaker, who brokered the deal that saw Sara Duterte take the vice presidential slot on Marcos' ticket, was former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Arroyo now stands as the single most influential political force behind the scenes of the Marcos presidency. It was under her presidency that the Philippines began to reorient its ties toward China.

She is joined in this by a man who had been her mortal enemy, former President Joseph Estrada. Arroyo took office after ousting Estrada through a constitutional coup with the backing of the military. They share a common alignment toward China, however, and common relations with the Marcoses, and Estrada has publicly pledged his enthusiastic support for Arroyo.

There are growing signs that a majority of the Philippine ruling class favor the country's orientation to China at the expense of Washington. They have expressed alarm at Washington's war drive in Ukraine and fear that similar moves against China could see the Philippines caught up in a bloody global war. Significant sections of the business community, particularly those based outside the capital city of Manila, favor relations with China, as they see possible infrastructure investment from China as a means of improving their access to the world market.

Second, Marcos represents advanced political preparations in the ruling class to carry out the repression of growing social unrest in the country, including the stripping away of basic constitutional rights and the possible imposition of open military dictatorship.

Fifty years ago, in 1972, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., citing the danger of “communism,” imposed martial law on the country to suppress an immense social crisis—demonstrations in the streets and a growing strike wave in the working class. The overwhelming majority of the ruling class backed Marcos in this, even his political opponents.

Marcos Sr. used his military dictatorship to ban all strikes. Under martial law over 70,000 people were arrested without warrant; nearly 4,000 were killed, and thousands more were tortured by the military. This brutal dictatorial rule continued until 1986, when Marcos was ousted in a popular uprising, coupled with an attempted military coup, which led to the installation of Corazon Aquino, the candidate of the bourgeois opposition. Marcos and his family, including Ferdinand Jr., were given a comfortable life in exile in Hawaii by the US government, which had

backed his dictatorship from the day it was declared.

Marcos Jr. has made the claim that martial law was a “golden age” in Philippine history the center of his campaign. This is not just a lying attempt to use his family name to secure votes, it is a promise as well. Marcos is telling the ruling class that he is running as the candidate of dictatorship.

When Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos were ousted in 1986, their rule was detested. They were corrupt, they were brutal. They were guilty of mass murder and the theft of billions of dollars. This was symbolized in popular consciousness by Imelda’s thousands of pairs of shoes, in a country where most people are lucky to afford a single pair and treat them with great care.

How is it possible that 36 years later, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has won election on the basis of the preposterous lie that his parents’ dictatorship was a golden age?

Marcos bought a good deal of his support, deploying the stolen wealth that his family still possesses. It is obvious from numerous grassroots accounts throughout the country that the crowds gathered at his rallies were brought in with the promise of envelopes of cash. The average sum of 500 pesos (about \$10 USD) per person is widely reported. There is a long established tradition of vote-buying in the Philippines, and there can be no doubt that Marcos engaged in this practice.

The purchase of support extended to the use of online troll farms. Marcos was backed by a systematic network of disinformation, creating videos and posts circulated on TikTok and Facebook that claimed to demonstrate that Marcos’ rivals were secretly communists, that martial law improved social conditions of the Philippines, that Marcos was personally possessed of immense wealth that he intended to redistribute if elected, and so on.

Vote-buying and the production of disinformation cannot alone account for the election results. The question must be asked regarding disinformation, in particular, much of which was quite crude, why did it spread? Why did it find a mass audience which deemed it credible?

When Corazon Aquino took office in 1986, there were immense illusions placed in the social changes that her government would carry out. After two decades of Marcos rule, things would finally change for the better. Aquino, one of the largest landowners in the country, changed very little. She incorporated many of the leading criminals of the martial law regime into her cabinet. By the end of her six years in office, she found it expedient to allow the Marcoses to return to the country.

No truth commission was ever set up; no investigation of the nature of the dictatorship was conducted. Aquino covered up the crimes of those who are now her allies. History textbooks were written on this basis. No one was taught what martial law had been. For a good many years, people repeated the phrase “never again,” but it gradually lost its meaning.

Much of the country now suffers from a systematically cultivated historical illiteracy. The Duterte administration has removed the teaching of history from high schools entirely, replacing it with the abstract and largely empty Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies).

This historical illiteracy makes possible the influence of disinformation, but it does not explain its appeal.

As it has for workers around the globe, the living standards of the Filipino working masses has declined over the course of the past three decades. Real wages have fallen. The immense social crisis gripping the country finds expression in the mass export of migrant labor. Fully 10 percent of the country’s population has been compelled to seek work overseas. Families are riven apart. There are very few working families that do not have a father or a mother, sister or son torn from them to work in Singapore or Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia or Taiwan.

The illusions in liberal democracy under the rule of the successors of martial law were shattered irretrievably. Leni Robredo, the leading opponent of Marcos and chair of the Liberal Party, long associated with

the Aquinos and the ouster of Marcos, was the inheritor of these shattered illusions. That she knew that her own banner was tattered and tainted was manifested in her decision to run as an independent and avoid public affiliation with her own party.

There is a degraded character to much of official democracy in the Philippines. Elections are conducted as public spectacles, nothing more. They are marked by singing, dancing, fireworks and the absence of coherent political thought. Elite politicians deliberately make fools of themselves in pursuit of votes.

Robredo did not break with this tradition but within its parameters staged a deliberately conservative, even right-wing campaign. She presented democracy as a question above all of civility and effectively counterposed herself as the decent, kindly opponent of Marcos. Day after day she staged rallies of hundreds of thousands, who wore pink and danced to the music of her campaign.

Doubtless the millions who voted for Robredo did so out of hostility to Marcos and all that he represents, but she had no concrete appeal to the tens of millions who sought not civility but an end to their poverty.

And while presenting herself as a quietly democratic force, Robredo met with the leading generals and pledged support for the continuation of the McCarthyite anticommunist apparatus, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), created under Duterte.

The Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) played an integral role in the victory of Marcos. The various legal organizations that follow its political line, operating under the umbrella organization BAYAN, campaigned alongside Marcos in 2010, when he ran for Senate, and they shared a slate behind real estate billionaire Manny Villar. The CPP enthusiastically promoted Rodrigo Duterte for president and claimed that the fascist political leader was a “socialist.” The far-right atmosphere that hangs over the country today has been made possible by the role of the Stalinists.

The Stalinists threw themselves into support for Leni Robredo, campaigning for her with an intensity without precedent in the history of the party. On May 1, 2022, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May One Movement), the labor union umbrella of the Stalinists, instructed their members that they were not to wave red flags nor were they to denounce the NTF-ELCAC. They did not want to offend their bourgeois allies.

There is a democratic tradition in the Philippines with deep historic roots in the revolutionary struggles of the working masses, but it has no connection with the country’s constitution and elections. These democratic traditions were hard won in the nation’s formative anti-colonial struggles against Spain and the United States.

The democratic tradition that persists in the Filipino masses consists of a passionate commitment to freedom of speech, a courageous willingness to jeer the powerful and, above all, a highly developed belief in the need for social equality.

The constitution and the parliamentary politics of the Philippines, however, were set up by the United States in a quest to stabilize the rule of their elite partners in the country. The representatives of American imperialism wrote martial law as an executive power into the country’s legal code and kept trial by jury out. Formal democracy has proven to be nothing but the apparatus of elite rule.

The Stalinists make no effort to build upon the democratic tradition of the Filipino working class; they seek to prop up the formal democratic rule of their bourgeois allies.

The victory of Marcos in the Philippines is a stark manifestation of a global trend. Marcos has political counterparts around the world: Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Marine Le Pen, Narendra Modi. Their rise expresses the fact that formal democracy has been hollowed out by social inequality. Confronting the intensifying growth of social unrest, driven by immense crisis now exacerbated by the pandemic, the ruling class is

turning to authoritarian forms of rule.

For more than four decades, the traditional liberal parties of the bourgeoisie have had nothing to offer, no progressive social measure of any substance. As the social crisis intensified over these decades, they lurched further and further to the right. It is this patent bankruptcy of bourgeois liberalism, aided and abetted by the pseudo-left, in the context of intense social crisis, that enables the rise of far-right forces basing themselves on populist lies.

Build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in the Philippines! Fill out the form below to take up the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact