



Power Play in the Philippine Midterm Election

By

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On [May 12, 2025](#), [Filipinos casted their votes](#) in midterm congressional elections. The election unfolded amid intensifying hostilities between two of the nation’s most powerful political dynasties. Current President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. and former President Rodrigo Duterte are fighting for control of the country. Although midterms traditionally draw less attention than presidential elections, this cycle was charged with high-stakes political rivalry, inflationary pressures, and external economic tensions linked to past US trade policy.

The election took on a new importance following the breakdown of the once powerful alliance between the Marcos and Duterte political dynasties—after the rapid political decline of the previously popular Duterte family. The [Dutertes accused President Marcos](#) of leading a deliberate effort to eliminate his most significant political rivals.

What began as a unified political force that dominated the [2022 elections disintegrated into a bitter rivalry](#), characterized by personal attacks and an impeachment move against Vice President Sara Duterte. She faces allegations of fund misuse, unexplained wealth accumulation, and even issuing threats against President Marcos, the First Lady, and the House Speaker.

The outcome of the Senate race was crucial, as senators will serve as jurors in the impeachment trial of the vice president. To convict Duterte and permanently bar her from public office, at least 16 of the 24 senators must vote in favor of removal.

The elections, which determined half of the Senate, the entire House of Representatives, and thousands of local officials, revealed a surprisingly even split between [Marcos- and Duterte-aligned candidates](#), defying pre-election polling that predicted a weaker performance from the Duterte faction. The final tally of votes shows that neither Marcos nor Duterte were the big winner in the Senate. Instead, a solid block of both Marcos and Duterte supporters was joined by various reformist candidates who are likely to serve as wild cards in both an impeachment trial and future legislative debates.

Meanwhile, former President Rodrigo Duterte was elected by a massive margin in his bid to reclaim the mayorship of Davao City, despite being detained by the International Criminal Court (ICC). He remained eligible to run because he has not been convicted of any crime. Unexpectedly, the strong showing from the Duterte bloc, combined with the deepening political divide, raises concerns about potential unrest, power consolidation efforts, or gridlock within key institutions even in the intelligence community. As rival factions jostle for influence, the risk of politically motivated violence, destabilizing protests, or coercive maneuvers at both the national and local levels may increase, threatening the country’s governance stability and democratic integrity.

President Marcos publicly distanced himself from the impeachment proceedings against Vice President Duterte. The President denies accusations that he is pursuing a personal vendetta against the Duterte family. Instead, [Marcos focused his campaign narrative](#) on the country’s economic progress and his firm stance on defending national sovereignty, highlighting his administration’s opposition to China’s assertive actions in the South China Sea. With tensions over Beijing’s regional behavior rising, China is a major political flashpoint in this election cycle.

By downplaying his involvement in the impeachment process, Marcos aims to protect his image as a unifying leader above partisan revenge, possibly to appeal to moderates. This move also helps shift public discourse away from the political feud and refocus it on policy, allowing him to sidestep accusations of using state power to silence rivals.

Marcos's hardline rhetoric on China serves as a strategic appeal to nationalist sentiment, which grew amid repeated maritime confrontations in the South China Sea. By taking a strong position against Beijing, he seeks to rally public support, differentiate himself from Duterte's historically China-friendly stance, and secure backing from defense-focused and pro-sovereignty voters.

The spotlight on China in the campaign reflects a broader trend of foreign policy becoming a domestic political issue. This signals a growing alignment between national security concerns and electoral strategy.

Marcos's tougher China policy also aligns with American interests in the region, potentially strengthening his international legitimacy while further polarizing his rivalry with the Dutertes, who are seen as closer to China.

Conclusion

The convergence of internal political rivalries, external geopolitical interests, and a shifting demographic base marks a potentially volatile era for Philippine democracy where political missteps could quickly escalate into security threats or international incidents. While the Philippines has a civic society and the institutional framework necessary for democratic resilience, political reform, especially an enforceable anti-dynasty law, is essential to revitalize governance.

The results from the Philippine midterm elections illustrate not only the enduring power of political dynasties, but also the rising intensity of intra-elite competition, as both the Marcos and Duterte factions entrench their influence in the Senate. The election's implications extend beyond politics into questions of institutional credibility, legal accountability, and long-term political stability. How this battle unfolds will shape the Philippines' democracy in the face of deepening polarization.

The Philippine midterm elections are no longer routine legislative exercises. They are a crucible for deeper structural tensions in the country's democracy. With institutional legitimacy, political accountability, and regional stability at stake, the results of elections could redefine the Philippines' democratic trajectory and security outlook in the years to come.

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