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The Pulse Asia Survey on Presidential Bets for the 2022 Elections: An Analysis of Results and Political Implications

This paper examines the results of the first public opinion survey on possible presidential bets for the 2022 national elections conducted by the Pulse Asia Research Inc. from 23 November to 2 December 2020. An established polling institution in the country, Pulse Asia does regular public opinion surveys on elections and issues of public interest. However, as a survey of public perceptions for a specific period, these results do not in any way establish a definitive listing of possible presidential bets or stable preferential ratings for specific names since the actual election is still about 15 months away and changes are to be expected.

Pulse Asia reported that the nationwide survey had a sample of 2,400 representative adults, 18 years old and above. It has a plus/minus 2% error margin at the 95% confidence level. The subnational estimates for each of the geographic areas covered (Metro Manila-NCR, rest of Luzon-BL, Visayas and Mindanao) have a plus/minus 4% error margin, also at the 95% confidence level.

In this survey, 11 names were included by Pulse Asia in the list of possible presidential bets although the respondents were allowed to write down names not in the list. The results are disaggregated by geographic regions and social classes. The Commission on Elections (Comelec) data in 2019 showed the following distribution of registered votes by the main regions: National Capital Region (NCR), 11%; Luzon, 45%; Visayas, 21%; and Mindanao, 20%.

In terms of social classes, Pulse Asia uses a three-level classification system (classes ABC, D, and E) based on a combination of the following indicators: material conditions/quality of neighborhood and house, educational attainment and occupation of household head, total household monthly income, and household facilities and appliances. Based on these factors, the Pulse Asia class distribution of respondents usually reflects the following figures: Class ABC, 5-10%; class D, 65-75%; and class E, 20-30%.

The 11 names of the possible presidential bets included in Pulse Asia's last survey can be divided into three analytical categories: 1) those openly identified with President Duterte; 2) those known as consistent critics of the president; and 3) those who may be considered as independent or relatively independent of the president's



policies and persona. This analytical classification also allows for an indirect reading of the level of support of Pres. Duterte at the time the survey was made with the ratings of each individual as a rough proxy of support or opposition.

Pulse Asia Research, Inc.
Table 1: 2022 Presidential Preferences
November 23 - December 2, 2020/ Philippines
(In Percent)

Survey Question: Of the people on this list, whom would you vote for as President of the Philippines if the May 22 elections were held today and they were candidates. You may mention others not included in this list.

Base: Total Interviews, 100%

	LOCATION					CLASS		
	PHIL	NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Sara Duterte	26	16	12	29	58	27	26	23
Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.	14	20	16	13	7	21	14	11
Grace Poe	14	12	17	15	8	10	14	18
Francisco Domagoso (Isko Moreno)	12	18	17	9	2	8	13	9
Manny Pacquiao	10	12	9	13	9	10	10	14
Leonor "Leni" Robredo	8	7	13	6	2	8	8	8
Panfilo Lacson	4	5	5	5	2	8	3	5
Christopher "Bong" Go	4	3	3	3	6	3	4	3
Alan Peter Cayetano	3	4	1	3	3	1	3	3
Richard Gordon	0.2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Antonio Carpio	0.1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	3
Don't know /Refused/None	4	2	7	1	3	5	4	2

Abbreviations:

Phil: Philippines

NCR: National Capital Region

VIS: Visayas

BL: Balance Luzon; all regions in Luzon except for the NCR.

MIN: Mindanao

On the basis of the political identities and current affiliations of the individuals in the survey list, the following groupings are made:



- 1) **Duterte camp:** Mayor Sara Duterte, former senator Ferdinand “BongBong” Marcos, Senator Emmanuel “Manny Pacquiao, Senator Christopher “Bong” Go, and Rep. Alan Peter Cayetano;
- 2) **Duterte critics:** Vice-President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo and former Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio.
- 3) **Independent or relatively independent:** Senator Grace Poe, Mayor Francisco Domagoso (Isko Moreno), Senator Panfilo “Ping” Lacson, and Senator Richard “Dick” Gordon.

Some would include Senators Grace Poe and Panfilo Lacson as among the critics of Pres. Duterte but others argue that their oppositionist stance is not as clear-cut as those of Robredo and Carpio. Others also include Senator Gordon within the Duterte camp.

Mayor Sara Duterte

Pres. Duterte’s daughter and incumbent mayor Sara Duterte of Davao city topped the Pulse Asia Survey in November-December 2020 (see Table 1) with 26% of the votes. Predictably, she received a huge margin of 58% of the Mindanao votes with the rest managing only single digit votes in this region. In the Visayas, Mayor Sara also had a significant margin of 14 % over the closest bet and also did well even in the National Capital Region and Balance of Luzon (Regions 1 to 5 but excluding the NCR) where she trailed the leaders by statistically non-significant margins. She also led all the others in terms of the class designation of the respondents in the three class categories.

For Duterte partisans, the biggest problem now is the seeming lack of interest by Mayor Sara for the presidential race in 2022. Shortly after the Pulse Asia survey results were announced, Mayor Sara publicly stated that her name should no longer be included in forthcoming surveys. She was also quoted as saying that perhaps she might run in 2034 when she would be just in her mid-fifties. Moreover, Pres. Duterte has in effect also discouraged her from running asserting that the presidential post is not for women candidates.

If for any reason Mayor Sara decides not to run for the presidency in 2022, this will make it easier for other ambitious politicians in the Duterte camp to make a bid for the presidency. However, this could also divide the electoral base of the pro-Duterte constituency.



Former Senator Ferdinand “BongBong” Marcos

In the survey, Bongbong Marcos tied for second place overall with Senator Grace Poe, with each getting 14% of the total. Marcos led all bets in the NCR (20%) and also did well in Balance of Luzon (16%) and the Visayas (13%) but fared badly in Mindanao (7%).

Marcos lost his vice-presidential bid in 2016 to Leni Robredo by a contested and narrow margin of about 265,000 votes. Even while Marcos officially ran with the late senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in 2016, among the Duterte followers there was in fact a faction that campaigned for a Duterte-Marcos team. If Sara Duterte does not run for the presidency in 2022, a presidential endorsement could be a possibility for a Marcos candidacy in 2022. This will be a big gain for Marcos since Mindanao has been his weakest electoral base. However, there are other pro-Duterte politicians who will likewise fiercely lobby for an official anointment by the outgoing president.

Senator Grace Poe

Tied for second place overall with BongBong Marcos at 14% of the total votes, Senator Poe shows significant electoral support in the Balance of Luzon and the Visayas. While she lost in the 2016 presidential elections placing 3rd after Duterte and Roxas, Sen. Poe continuous to command a substantial national following. In her first national electoral contest, she topped the senatorial winners in 2013 and placed 2nd in the 2019 senatorial contest.

However, it is probably too soon for Sen. Poe to seek the presidency if she is mindful of the country’s recent electoral history. Politicians in the country who mounted second and third bids for the presidency after their initial failures had all lost. This list includes formidable personalities such as the late Senators Miriam Defensor Santiago and Raul Roco and even former Pres. Estrada who also failed in his second bid after his truncated presidential term. If Sen. Poe decides to run later in 2028, she will be only 60 years old, the average age for the five post-EDSA-1 presidents.

Mayor Francisco Domagoso “Isko Moreno”

Better known by his movie name, “Isko Moreno”, Mayor Domagoso of Manila stunned the political scene in 2019 by defeating reelectionist Manila mayor and former Pres. Joseph Estrada. Propelled by his populist charisma and policies and deft handling of media, he has captivated a national constituency beyond Manila as shown by the latest survey. His overall electoral support of 12% puts him in a statistical tie with that of Marcos (14%), Poe (14%), and Pacquiao (10%). Not surprisingly, his strongest support comes from the NCR, Balance of Luzon and class D. For the vice-presidency, Mayor Domagoso (17%) is also among the first three choices by the survey respondents, together with Mayor Duterte (16%) and Senate President Vicente “Tito” Sotto, III (14%).



However, as a first-term mayor of the historic city of Manila, he is unlikely to seek a national position this early in his political career. Before aiming for a national elective position, it is more likely that he will first consolidate his current position as Manila mayor for another term or two and use this later as a launching pad for a national political career. If Isko Moreno does run for a national position in 2022, he has good chances at the vice-presidential or senatorial contest.

Senator Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao

Senator Pacquiao received 10% of the total votes in this survey, a statistical tie with that of Mayor Domagoso (12%) and Vice-President Robredo (8%). His assumption of the presidency of the *Partido ng Demokratikong Pilipino-Laban* (PDP-Laban) in December 2020 has strengthened the perception that he is laying the ground for his presidential run. The PDP-Laban is also Pres. Duterte’s official party.

Unless supported by Pres. Duterte or selected by PDP-Laban or the *Hugpong* of Mayor Sara as its official candidate, Pacquiao lacks a nationwide organizational alliance of key political families and influential politicians from key regions of the country. PDP-Laban which he now formally leads also suffered an internal fracture in 2020 when former House Speaker and PDP-Laban stalwart Pantaleon Alvarez announced his departure from the party.

A presidential run by Pacquiao independently of the decision made by Pres. Duterte or PDP-Laban risks driving a fatal wedge among the supporters of Duterte, especially if other partisans of the president also decide to run such as Marcos, Bong Go, and Cayetano. But given his relative youth (only 44 years old in 2022) and lack of political experience, Pacquiao could also simply bide his time. He might just run for the vice-presidency or run for reelection in the Senate in 2022.

Vice-President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo

The incumbent vice-president Leni Robredo received 8% of the total votes and showed her strongest electoral support in Balance of Luzon (13%) where she was statistically tied with the three biggest vote-getters in this region: Sen. Poe, 17%; Mayor Isko Moreno, 17%; and Bongbong Marcos, 16%.

A relative political neophyte who had only served one term in the House of Representatives, she won a major victory as vice-president in 2016, defeating better known and more experienced politicians that included former senators Bongbong Marcos, Alan Peter Cayetano, Francis Escudero, Antonio Trillanes, and Gregorio Honasan.

As the highest elected official of the opposition Liberal Party, vice-president Robredo is expected to be the party’s official candidate for the presidency in 2022. With her more consultative and inclusive personality shaped by her work experience



with civil society groups, Robredo's public image and leadership style contrasts sharply with that of Duterte's strong-man persona and track-record. Her greatest challenge as the opposition presidential candidate in 2022 lies in being able to orchestrate a unified opposition slate while hoping that the Duterte camp will be divided by a number of presidential aspirants.

Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson

Sen. Lacson received 4% of the total votes and was statistically tied with both Senator Bong Go (4%) and Representative and former House Speaker, Alan Peter Cayetano (3%). A former head of the Philippine National Police (PNP), Lacson has also served for three terms in the Philippine Senate.

Lacson has authored or co-authored several important laws including the recent highly controversial Anti-Terror Law approved by Duterte in 2020. He is well-known for his decision to personally reject the use of "pork barrel" funds traditionally assigned to legislators of both the Senate and the House. He has also earned the distinction of being the militant watchdog of the budget preparation in Congress helping ensure that the entire process fully complies with constitutional and legal mandates.

If Sen. Lacson aims for the presidency in 2022, he runs the risk of dividing the opposition. Lacson's detractors fear that a presidential run for him in 2022 as he did in the 2004 presidential election will undercut the possibility of a unified opposition against a Duterte-backed candidate. With Lacson's public persona as a "more rational version" of Duterte, he could attract voters who are wary of another Duterte-anointed candidate and yet still amenable to having a willful leader without the abuses associated with the outgoing president.

Senator Christopher "Bong" Go

Receiving 4% of the total votes, Sen. Bong Go enjoys special ties with President Duterte. He has served as Duterte's close and trusted ally since the latter was still mayor of Davao city. A complete political greenhorn, Go won a Senate seat in the 2019 elections benefitting largely from the huge material and political resources he enjoyed from his close association with the president.

If Mayor Sara does not run in 2022, Sen. Go has a good shot at being in the short list of possible aspirants to be anointed by Duterte. However, such an endorsement could provoke a backlash from other presidential bets in the Duterte camp who are dismissive of Bong Go's lack of popular appeal and independent political track-record. It is also possible that Sen. Go could be considered for the vice-presidency especially if the Duterte-anointed candidate is from Luzon.



Representative Alan Peter Cayetano

Representative and former House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano received only 3% of the total votes but he has been long perceived as interested in running for the presidency. The losing vice-presidential running mate of Duterte in 2016, Cayetano ran for the lower House in 2019 and became Speaker of the House in a term-sharing arrangement with Rep. Lord Allan Velasco.

An ambitious and experienced politician, Cayetano sought to make the House Speakership as a launching pad for his future plans for a higher office. However, Cayetano's plans went awry when he tried to sidetrack the Speakership term-sharing arrangement with Rep. Velasco, another close Duterte ally. Aside from displeasing Pres. Duterte, Cayetano was also not in good terms with Mayor Sara and brother, Rep. Paolo Duterte, who both helped mobilize the critical mass of legislators that forced Cayetano to comply with the term-sharing arrangement of the House Speakership with Rep. Velasco.

With the unexpected turn of political events against Cayetano, it is difficult to see him aiming for the presidency without the endorsement of Pres. Duterte. Still relatively young however, Cayetano might consider a second run for the vice-presidency in 2022, or reclaim his old Senate seat or simply run for another term in the lower House.

Senator Richard "Dick" Gordon

A two-term senator and a losing presidential candidate in the 2010 presidential elections, incumbent senator Richard "Dick" Gordon managed to get only 0.2% of the total survey votes. He has broad executive experience having served as city mayor of Olongapo city, chairman of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), and Secretary of Tourism during the Macapagal-Arroyo administration.

As the current chair of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, Gordon has presided over many sensitive hearings including the illegal drug syndicates and corruption cases involving ranking government officials. In his current capacity as chair of the Philippine National Red Cross, Gordon has engaged the government in contentious negotiations for the proper compensation of the Red Cross for services as a major virus testing center during the pandemic.

There have been no indications that Gordon is interested in running for the presidency in 2022. Moreover, a major concern is his age since he would be 76 years old during the election year.

Retired Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio

Receiving 0.1% of the survey votes, the inclusion of retired Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio in the polling list is somewhat of a surprise.



In some public fora, Carpio had announced that he has no interest in the presidency. He is well known for his passionate advocacy of asserting the country's maritime entitlements in the South China/West Philippine Sea as recognized by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016.

The Survey Results and Support for President Duterte

The polling presidential preferences may also be read as an indirect rough proxy for President Duterte's level of support during the time the survey was conducted in November and early December last year. Following this rough approximation, the level of support appears as follows:

Duterte's Core Support Base:

Votes for Sara Duterte (26%) and Christopher "Bong" Go (4%) = 30%

Duterte's Expanded Support Base:

Bongbong Marcos (14%) + Emmanuel Pacquiao (10%) + Alan Peter Cayetano (3%) + Core support base (30%) = 57%

Anti-Duterte Support Base: Core and Expanded

The anti-Duterte core support base is represented by Vice President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo who received (8%) of the total votes.

The Expanded Anti-Duterte Support Base or Contested Support Base: Another way of reading the survey data is that votes received by certain personalities in the survey list are contested and could be interpreted as approximations of possible support or non-support for Duterte.

This reading yields the following results: Grace Poe (14%) + Francisco Domagoso "Isko Moreno" (12%) + Panfilo Lacson (4%) = 30%. If these votes are read as closer to an anti-Duterte sentiment, then the expanded anti-Duterte electoral base will be about 38% with the inclusion of Robredo's 8% share of the votes.

The votes received by Senator Gordon (0.2%) and Justice Carpio (0.1%) are excluded because of their insignificance.

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