

FERDINAND MARCOS JR.

Philippines: The Marcos victory - Looking back at history

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Solid North 'bus' zooms on as political juggernaut.

The Solid North is very much alive and growing, giving president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr. a rare majority victory

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines – Vice President Leni Robredo loved to read out supporters' placards during her campaign sorties for the May 2022 elections.

At the Takder Kordi rally held at the Melvin Jones football grounds in this city, one of the placards she read was, "Bus Lang Ang Solid North." It drew one of the loudest cheers from the 30,000 folks at the event.

The written quip referred to the Solid North Bus Lines, which was established in 2010 and primarily plied the Pangasinan-Manila route.

The predominantly young audience repeatedly roared "Awan ti Solid North!" (There is No Solid North).

But a week later, the country realized again that the Solid North was still alive and growing.

In Ilocos Norte, according to the final count, hometown son and former governor Ferdinand Marcos Jr. got 356,221 votes against Robredo's 10,043 votes.

Even in a 10-way fight, Marcos got 95.84% of the vote.

The incoming president's home province gave him the highest winning percentage among all provinces in the country.

Returns from the whole Ilocos Region – which also includes Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Pangasinan provinces – were equivalent to 89.23% for Marcos if the election were one-on-one against Robredo.

But the two other regions in the Solid North gave Marcos an even higher percentage win. Cagayan

Valley recorded 90.74% and the Cordillera went even higher with 91.37% for Marcos in a head-to-head contest with Robredo.

The only time regions I and II (Cordillera was formerly distributed between the two regions) voted solidly was in the 1986 snap elections, when the late dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos, the president-elect's father, won over Corazon Aquino. She would later assume the presidency following the 1986 EDSA People Power revolt.

While the placard said, "Bus lang ang Solid North," that bus has carried the Marcoses to victory.

Cover-up for fraud

Assistant Professor Reidan Pawilen of the University of the Philippines Los Baños describes the Solid North as a campaign phenomenon.

In his paper, "The Solid North Myth: An investigation on the status of dissent and human rights during the Marcos Regime in Regions 1 and 2, 1969-1986," Pawilen refers to Solid North as "the block voting behavior of Regions 1 and 2 that helped in electing Marcos to power during his 20-year rule in the Philippines."

Even then, the Solid North was not played cleanly.

"While the Solid North justified Marcos' victories in the 1965, 1969, 1981, and the 1986 elections, the phenomenon also served a political function and became a propaganda that blanketed the massive electoral frauds during his term," Pawilen said.

The eminent Ilocano scholar Arnold Molina Azurin offered a similar definition to Solid North.

"It is a propaganda that should be understood in this particular sense, a solo block of canvassed votes in Ilocano-speaking region or provincial district whether the ballots are counted regularly or not, whether the votes are the actual result of election fraud such as vote-buying or intimidation or some other trickery, but what is important is to ensure a winning margin of votes," said Azurin, author of *Reinventing the Filipino, Beddeng, and Beyond the Cult of Dissidence in Southern Philippines and Wartorn Zones in the Global Village*.

[PHOTO: PAYING RESPECTS. Presumptive president Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. visits the grave of his father, the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, at the Libingan ng mga Bayani in Taguig City on May 11, 2022.]

The Solid North of the son indeed follows the father's Solid North playbook.

In this election, 595 precincts gave zero votes to Robredo.

Although more than half of them were in Sulu, almost 100 were in the Solid North area (45 in Abra, 20 in Ilocos Norte, 16 in Ilocos Sur, 6 in Apayao, 3 in La Union, and 2 each in Kalinga and Ifugao, and 1 each in Isabela and Cagayan).

The last time this happened was in 1986 when, for example, 13,643 voted for Marcos Sr. in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, against 0 for Corazon Aquino.

Even then, international observers called this a "statistical improbability" – a term used repeatedly by Marcos Jr.'s critics in these recent elections. (READ: The 'constant 47% ratio' explained)

While there are many parallelisms in the Solid North of father and son, there are also deviations.

But one thing remains constant: the only passengers on the bus are the Marcoses.

Myth-making

Ferdinand E. Marcos was not the first Ilocano president. Elpidio Quirino, the son of a jail warden of Vigan, Ilocos Sur, won as president over Jose Laurel in 1949, but the Ilocano race card was hardly used then.

Ferdinand Marcos fought president Diosdado Macapagal, the “poor man son of Lubao, Pampanga,” in his re-election bid in 1965.

It was then that the Solid North was born.

The Marcos-Macapagal contest was first a battle of personalities, using popular culture as the battleground.

[PHOTO: ART FOR POLITICS. The late president Diosdado Macapagal had his life story turned into a movie in 1963 as he staved off a challenge from then-Senate president Ferdinand E. Marcos, but lost his re-election bid in 1965 to the ‘Solid North’ candidate. Photo from Frank Cimatú’s collection]

Macapagal brought out his movie bio entitled *The Macapagal Story* in 1963, with Leopoldo Salcedo playing the lead role and Jose Padilla Jr., Liza Moreno, Lina Cariño, Jay Ilagan, Rosa Aguirre, Oscar Keese, and Danilo Jurado in supporting roles.

The great Gerardo de Leon also came out with another movie entitled *Daigdig ng Mga Api*, again inspired by the life of Macapagal. Movie critics said the movie was a classic, although no copy can be found now.

Marcos then came out with *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* (*The Ferdinand E. Marcos Story*), with a blockbuster cast including Luis Gonzales as Ferdinand, Gloria Romero as Imelda, Vilma Santos as Imee, Chona as Irene, and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as himself. This is the first time that the younger Ferdinand, nicknamed Bongbong, was used for propaganda.

The Macapagal Story was shown mostly in Manila while *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* was shown in the provinces during the campaign, particularly in the Solid North.

In 1969, *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* had a sequel entitled, *Pinagbuklod ng Langit*. Directed by Eddie Garcia, it again had Luis Gonzales and Gloria Romero as the Marcos couple and Vilma as Imee. Rosa Mia played Doña Josefa Edralin while Gina Alajar played Irene and Jojie Aranda as Bongbong.

There was actually a second sequel to this Marcos myth-making. This was *Maharlika*, about Marcos’ fabricated guerrilla exploits. It starred Dovie Beams, who interestingly also became Marcos’ mistress, which was why the movie was not shown.

There was a November 1980 letter by Luis Nepomuceno of the Nepomuceno Productions, asking Imelda Marcos for help because his film studio went bankrupt after the movie was shelved.

“During my last audience with you in 1971 you entrusted to me the responsibility of safeguarding the film, which we shelved from exhibition, entitled *Maharlika*,” Luis wrote Imelda.

The Philippine National Bank foreclosed Nepomuceno’s properties, including his house, in 1974, but

Imelda remained adamant about not bringing out the third film.

[PHOTO: ,MYTH-MAKING. The late dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos commissioned a book on his alleged exploits as a World War II hero, but his claims and supposed medals and citations were later debunked. Photo by Frank Cimatú]

Marcos also commissioned his biography, written in 1964 by a hack writer named Hartzell Spence, entitled, *For Every Tear a Victory: The Story of Ferdinand E. Marcos*.

This predictably became a bestseller in the Philippines as it was distributed for free in many Ilocos Norte towns.

Then-senator Marcos paid at least US\$15,000 in 1963 to Spence and also told the publisher McGraw-Hill that he would guarantee \$10,000 in sales, according to Leonard Saffir, the PR specialist hired by Marcos.

“This means that if they sell only \$7,000 worth of books, we owe them \$3,000,” Saffir explained to Marcos.

Pawilen said that the book was “where some controversial historical claims were included such as his role in the Second World War and his war medals.”

Alfred McCoy, an American historian, however, was able to gather and evaluate the documents that Marcos submitted and found out that the so-called documents on the Maharlika guerrilla unit that Marcos was supposed to command were forged, and that the medals that he claimed to have received from the US military were fake.

“In 2013, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines published a detailed analysis on how the documents were forged, complete with actual photographs of the fake documents,” Pawilen wrote.

The victory of Marcos over Macapagal could be attributed to this historical revisionism, but in Ilocos, a more sinister strategy solidified the Solid North.

FRANK CIMATU

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Blood and money, not gold and honey, birthed Solid North

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines – There is a misconception that the late president Ferdinand E. Marcos reinforced the Solid North by providing aid and support to the Ilocano people.

The common perception was, “that Ilocanos were voting solidly for the Marcoses not just because of the ethnic ties to the north, but also because the Ilocanos had a relatively better experience as compared to the other parts of the Philippines during the Martial Law period, with Marcos pouring over billions of funds, especially in his home province of Ilocos Norte,” UP sociology professor

Reidan Pawilen wrote in "The Solid North Myth: An investigation on the status of dissent and human rights during the Marcos Regime in Regions 1 and 2, 1969-1986."

Jessie Vizcarra, a human rights lawyer from Vigan City, Ilocos Sur, said this popular view – still common today – glosses over the history of Ilocano activism at that time and the repression suffered by Ilocanos during the Martial Law period.

Vizcarra agreed with Pawilen's view that for the North to be solid, Ilocos had to be broken down.

He said that in forming the Solid North in 1965, Marcos had to build alliances with known political warlords at that time. These were congressmen Floro Singson Crisologo of Ilocos Sur, Miguel T. Cases of La Union, and Antonio Raquiza of Ilocos Norte.

Raquiza had been a congressman of Ilocos Norte from 1949 until 1966, and then again from 1978 to 1986. He also served briefly as governor from 1955 to 1957.

After forging an alliance with Marcos, Raquiza became secretary of public works, transportation, and communications.

Cases was a five-term congressman of the 2nd District of La Union from 1946 to 1965.

[Photo: VIOLENT TIMES. An old 'Manila Times' photo of the Crisologos and the saka-saka army on display at the Crisologo Museum in Vigan, Ilocos Sur. Photo from the Crisologo Museum]

The most notorious of Marcos' allies was Crisologo. He and his wife Carmeling Pichay Crisologo, who served as governor from 1964 to 1961, were the conjugal political kingpins of Ilocos Sur.

Floro was part of the Marcos Cabinet in 1965, when the former Senate president crushed president Diosdado Macapagal's re-election bid.

He and Raquiza were the only politicians in the early Cabinet filled with technocrats and political administrators.

"While President Marcos relied on political administrators like Salas and Syquio for administrative and program results, he maintained his contacts with old political friends. To some extent, this was forced on him by the Nacionalista Party elite who did not particularly like the way the president was running the country and the party," wrote Aprodicio Laquian of the International Development Research Centre in 1970.

Floro Crisologo was widely touted to have authored the bills creating the Social Security System and the Tobacco Law.

Virginia tobacco was then a burgeoning cash crop in the country. The Crisologos tried to monopolize it in Ilocos Sur by establishing the Farmer's Cooperative Marketing Association (Facoma), which bought the tobacco harvest of the farmers. They also built a tobacco leaf drying plant in the province.

The Crisologos also organized a 300-member private army, which the residents nicknamed the "saka-saka" or the "barefooted."

The saka-saka was used for the tobacco blockade to ensure that the Manila-bound trucks filled with tobacco would pay their "tax," sometimes amounting to \$100 for each truck. In 1965, the Philippine currency's value was around P3.90 to one dollar.

Also, the saka-saka would ensure another Marcos victory in the November 1969 presidential elections.

Pyrrhic victory

In 1969, President Marcos geared for his second – and supposedly final – term against then-Cebu senator Sergio Osmeña.

And, again, the Solid North delivered the votes for its native son.

[PHOTO: RE-ELECTION BID. President Ferdinand E. Marcos campaigns under an acacia tree during his re-election bid in 1969. Photo by Carmen Floirendo]

If the 1965 elections were a Hollywood battle, the 1969 elections seemed like a typical Pinoy gangster movie.

It marked the first time that “Three Gs” – or guns, goons, and gold – entered the lexicon of Philippine political terms.

“During his 1969 reelection effort, President Marcos stumped vigorously, reaching even remote villages to personally place a check for two thousand pesos in the hands of each barrio captain, obligating them, in the country’s political culture, to use every possible means to deliver a winning margin,” wrote Alfred W. McCoy in his 2009 book, *Policing America’s Empire*.

Marcos became the first Philippine president to win a second term.

He garnered 5,017,343 votes against Osmeña’s 3,043,122 – winning in all provinces, except Pampanga and Antique.

The grip of Marcos on his Solid North was almost the same as in 1965.

He got 777,514 votes, or 80%, from the Solid North provinces of Abra, Batanes, Benguet, Cagayan, Ifugao, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Isabela, Kalinga-Apayao, La Union, Mountain Province, and Pangasinan. Osmeña only got 197,462 votes. Eerily enough, that was the same winning percentage he got in the Solid North in 1965.

Ilocos Norte gave their hometown boy 80,631 votes or a whopping 98.5%. Osmeña got only 1,215.

Ilocos Sur and La Union gave similar winning percentages of 91%.

But it was a pyrrhic victory for Marcos.

“This strategy cost Marcos a hefty \$50 million, far more than the \$34 million Richard Nixon had spent to win the U.S. presidency in 1968,” McCoy pointed out in his book.

“Overspending by the government occasioned by the 1969 re-election campaign of Mr. Marcos precipitated the third balance-of-payments crisis in 1970,” former UP professor Manuel F. Montes, now a senior advisor on finance and development at the South Centre in Geneva, wrote in a 1987 paper, “Stabilization and Adjustment Policies and Programmes,” for the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research.

What followed, he added, was the 1970 International Monetary Fund-sponsored adjustment program. This required a 43% devaluation and the reduction in selected tariff rates.

"The reforms effectively brought to an end a brief and half-hearted flirtation with export-led growth," Montes pointed out.

The 2 Gs

Despite the Philippines losing almost half its currency value in the process of securing Marcos' re-election, "gold" was only one-third of the Marcos strategy.

"The 1969 campaign also produced incidents of political terror of the sort not seen since the 1951 elections. With the [Philippine] Constabulary now under the command of Marcos loyalist Vicente Raval, the PC's Special Forces orchestrated violence in four swing provinces that left forty-six dead," wrote McCoy.

One of these swing provinces was Batanes.

"In its ruling on these violations, the Supreme Court was particularly critical of what it called the 'rape of democracy in Batanes,' a remote island where the Special Forces allowed motorcycle-riding goons dubbed the 'Suzuki boys' to coerce a winning margin in the congressional race for a close Marcos ally," McCoy said.

The Supreme Court in April 1970 issued an en banc decision affirming the Commission on Elections (Comelec) resolution to annul the proclamation of Marcos ally, Rufino Antonio Jr., as congressman of Batanes. Rejecting the election returns from 21 precincts in the island province, the High Court proclaimed Jorge Abad as the winner.

Abad is the father of Florencio "Butch" Abad, who became the representative of Batanes in 1987 before briefly serving as secretary of agrarian reform, and again from 1995 to 2004.

During the 1969 elections campaign, another Marcos alliance would fall.

"The height of the Solid North was also the peak of the 3Gs of the Constabulary and the private armies," said Arnold Molina Azurin.

"The investigative reports on poll-related incidents in Ilocos Sur by Jose Burgos for the Manila Times include ambushes and arson," he added.

"Solid North thus became as peaceful as a graveyard and solid as a bullet," he said.

In September 1969, Crisologo's saka-saka killed the former mayor of Bantay town, just a stone's throw away from Vigan.

A month later, the prosecutors indicted Crisologo's son, Vicente, for being the mastermind.

"During the elections, the presence of ROTC cadets and hundreds of seminarians guarded the ballots while some held processions with lit candles to accompany the ballots to local Comelec precincts," Azurin said.

After the elections in May 1970, Vicente again led the saka-saka in burning Bantay's Ora Este and Ora Centro for supporting the opposition in the province.

Azurin said the stories of Burgos brought the Bantay inferno to Manila.

"Operation Bantay" was formed by 42 civil society and religious groups in Ilocos Sur to demand justice for the burning of the two villages.

Marcos ordered arson charges filed against Vicente Crisologo.

But the Crisologos were not yet finished.

Floro Crisologo reportedly went to Malacanang to demand that Marcos give him his share of victory spoils from the Solid North.

He reportedly threatened to expose the role of Marcos and his cousin Fabian Ver in cornering the tobacco monopoly in the Ilocos Region.

In October 1970, Floro Crisologo was shot dead in the head while kneeling inside the St. Paul Metropolitan Cathedral in Vigan.

Fifty years later, his attackers could come out and still be immune from prosecution, but the crime remains unresolved.

Carmeling Crisologo said that she was not interested in pursuing the case.

Son Vicente was convicted of arson in 1970 and sentenced to double life imprisonment. Before his actual imprisonment in June 1972, he still managed to run as mayor of Vigan in 1971.

He lost to Evaristo “Titong” Singson, while Carmelita lost to Luis “Chavit” Singson, Vicente’s cousin and Titong’s brother.

Thus was born the reign of Chavit Singson, who remains Ilocos Sur’s political kingpin.

President Marcos in 1980 pardoned Vincent, who was released from prison seconds before the New Year on December 31, 1980.

He would later serve as Quezon City 1st District councilor from 1998 to 2004, then successfully campaigned for the district’s congressional seat. He served three terms until 2013 and returned after a one-term break in 2016, becoming the Deputy Majority Leader in the House of Representatives.

Chavit is one of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s main campaigners and financiers in 2022. Though he claims to be retired from politics, his shadow will be as formidable as that of Floro Crisologo in the Cabinet of Marcos the father.

FRANK CIMATU

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Ilocano diaspora created Solid North, Fluid North

The ‘Solid North’ may be about vote manipulation and the 3Gs, but is also a cultural survival kit for Ilocano migrants

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines - One of the persistent myths about the Marcoses is that they were responsible for bringing Ilocanos to the Philippines' so-called frontier areas. These were the sparsely populated areas with lush natural resources, like Mindanao, Apayao, Kalinga, and Palawan.

"Si Don Mariano po ang nagturo mag-farming ang mga taga-Mindanao at nagbigay po s'ya ng Libreng Lupa sa mga taga Mindanao," a certain E. Marcos wrote in a glowing and inaccurate Facebook post on the life of Mariano Marcos, the father of the late president Ferdinand E. Marcos. (Don Mariano taught Mindanaoans to farm and gave them free land.)

The post came out in May 2014, two years before the late dictator's son and namesake failed in his bid for the vice presidency, and eight years before he achieved a majority victory in the 2022 presidential election.

Mariano was a supervising teacher in Laoag, Ilocos Norte. He did not teach nor farm in Mindanao.

When we went to Narra in Palawan to cover the administration of contraceptive implants among the women there, a barangay official told us that it was Ferdinand Marcos who brought the Ilocanos to that town.

Narra was not named after the indigenous hardwood but after the National Resettlement Rehabilitation Administration, a program started in 1954 to resettle landless Luzonians in Palawan. The municipality of Narra was indeed created in 1969 by then-president Marcos, but the Ilocanos had by then already long settled in Palawan.

Ilocanos, in fact, started migrating to other parts of the country centuries ago.

Ilocano diaspora

According to demographer Peter Xenos, the situation of Ilocanos is novel in the Philippines because early population pressure had begun to impinge on their agricultural system.

During the Spanish period, the population density in the Ilocos Coast was already three times that of the rest of the colony, Xenos wrote in "The Ilocos Coast since 1800," one of several essays in the book *Population and History: the Demographic Origins of the Modern Philippines*, published in 1998 by the University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Ilocos land is not the most fertile in the country, so something had to give. That is why demographers refer to the Great Ilocano Diaspora in the 19th century when the Ilocanos started streaming out of their historic homeland.

"By the end of the nineteenth century, more than 290,000 Ilocanos - 36% of the entire self-identified population - had come to live outside the four provinces of the Ilocos Coast and the Abra River valley - the last itself an expansion territory," Xenos said.

In Philippine history, this represented one of the major migrations by members of one Philippine language group.

Ilocano farmers mostly went to the inner portion of the Central Plain of Luzon, with just less than two-thirds of the diasporic Ilocanos moving to Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, and Pangasinan in 1903. Many also migrated to Cagayan Valley and Zambales.

In 1970, Xenos said that a huge part of northern and central Luzon was already ethnically and linguistically Ilocano.

“Of the 196 Luzon municipalities numerically dominated by Ilocanos in that year, only 88 were on the Ilocos Coast itself,” Xenos pointed out.

“Ilocanos have also migrated to Manila and to more distant destinations, such as Mindanao, Hawaii, and California,” he added.

So, in 1969, when Marcos got his second term, he had a Solid North which actually became fluid, having already taken roots in other parts of the country.

Meanwhile, Osmeña’s Cebu bailiwick did not even deliver for him as he lost to Marcos in his home province.

Ben Luther Lucas, veteran non-governmental organization worker in the North and now a business advisor of Agriterria, said that the Solid North was part of Marcos’s plan.

“He was an ambitious politician who was even the first to become a political butterfly (he changed parties from Liberal to the Nacionalista) to further his cause. He had a decisive political trajectory and he was not afraid to mobilize his ethnicity to spread his influence,” Lucas said.

“He was said to have brought Ilocanos to the farthest parts of Mindanao for his grand ambition,” Lucas added.

Abelardo Cruz, former executive director of the Center for Nationalist Studies and now an NGO consultant in the Mekong River area, said that when the Ilocanos went into their frontier areas outside Ilocos, they brought not only their knowledge in agriculture but also the Ilocos-style politics.

“The Ilocos Coast is a narrow coastal strip. The only large area is Pangasinan and the Ilocanos have occupied Urdaneta upward already. Even before that, they have gone to Cagayan and Isabela,” Cruz said.

“Because of its narrowness, Ilocos has to open up and that means building roads and waterways. So the roads were built and Magat Dam and Pantabangan Dam were made by Marcos to irrigate the frontier areas,” he said.

So with the farmers, we have political families like the Dumlaos of Nueva Vizcaya, Aguinaldos of Cagayan, Mangaoangs of Kalinga, Cuasmas of Nueva Vizcaya, and the Enriles of Cagayan who were originally the Purugganans of La Union.

Then these were followed by the wave of Chinese mestizos like Dys and Lims, who controlled the logging. Most of their workers were also from Ilocos and Pangasinan, Cruz said.

Cordillera: The reluctant part

At the apex of the Solid North, Cordillera was not even a region. It was divided then, belonging to either Region I (Abra, Mountain Province, Benguet, and Baguio City) and Region II (Ifugao and Kalinga-Apayao).

Anthropologist Joanna Cariño, who was a teacher during Martial Law, said she was not even aware of the Solid North.

“What I know is that Marcos Ilocano cronies were lapping up huge contracts to destroy Cordillera. Herminio Disini of Ilocos Sur was awarded 200,000 hectares of upland Abra, Apayao, and Mountain Province to manufacture rayon and kraft paper,” Cariño said.

Another was to create the Chico River Dam, which would have been the third dam to help Ilocano farmers.

[Photo: HEROES MONUMENT. The metal panels of this monument, built in 2017 but since dismantled, pay tribute to Macli-ing Dulag, Lumbaya Gayudan, and Pedro Dungoc, who led the resistance against the Chico River Dam and other acts of development aggression in the Cordillera. Photo courtesy of Rogyn Beyao/Innabuyog-Kalinga.]

Cariño said the catchment area of the planned Chico Dam was from the headwaters of Mt. Data down to Dam 4 at Tomiangan, Kalinga, or a total of 1,400 square kilometers.

The watershed would have affected 10 towns in Kalinga and Mountain Province.

From 1973 to 1978, Cordillera elders held multi-party peace pacts to fight the construction of these two projects.

Cariño said the communist New People's Army (NPA) was able to recruit many villagers in these areas. The government responded with militarization and hamletting. The culmination of this was the murder of anti-Chico dam leader Macli-ing Dulag on April 24, 1980.

She said that one good thing coming from this was the Cordillera's quest for autonomy, which was enshrined in the 1986 Constitution.

In 1985, representatives Jess Paredes of Ifugao and Honorato Aquino of Baguio filed for the regionalization of Cordillera.

After the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, President Corazon Aquino signed on July 15, 1987, Executive Order 220, creating the Cordillera Administrative Region.

In 1990 and 1998, the plebiscites creating the Cordillera Autonomous Region lost.

Since then, Cordillera congressmen have not been able to pass the organic bill until late May 2022, when House Bill 5687 was passed on the third reading.

If a plebiscite is set, it would give activists like Cariño a chance to debate the complexities of regional autonomy.

But this could be an uphill climb. Senatorial topnotcher Robin Padilla is now head of the constitutional amendment committee, favoring federalization, which would be at odds with the Cordillera. Padilla has been saying that he descended from the Ibaloy Cariños to which Joanna belongs.

And Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s party is Partido Federal ng Pilipinas.

President Rodrigo Duterte also allowed the building of the Chico River Dam starting in May 2020, renaming it the Chico River Irrigation Pump Project. It is part of the \$1.1 billion loan commitment of China to the Philippines. The project alone will cost P4.37 billion, partly financed by China Eximbank with a loan of P3.6 billion.

When the project was inaugurated in 2019, the National Irrigation Administration said it would increase rice production in Kalinga to 36,000 metric tons of rice, benefiting 4,000 rice farmers. It is supposed to be finished in 2022.

Mindanao and beyond

[Photo: SEEKING GREENER PASTURES. Ilocanos migrating to Cagayan Valley at the start of the 20th century. Wikipedia, from Guttenberg collection]

One of the most engaging Youtube shows was shown in December 2021, featuring a young man talking to his grandmother in Ilocano. Only, they were in Sultan Kudarat.

The old woman recalled her part in the Ilocano diaspora, going to Mindanao on a boat from Tarlac, which was already an extension of Ilocos at that time.

She spoke about her frontier life and how she struggled with malaria and other tropical diseases, and about the Japanese forces that invaded them.

The video has garnered 150,000 views and earned 1,000 comments, all from Ilocanos sharing their collective experiences as Ilocanos in a strange town.

Like Narra, which is considered the Rice Granary of Palawan, the towns where the Ilocanos settled – like Tacurong, Tagum City, Kabacan, and many others – became progressive towns because of the unity of the Ilocanos in lending a hand to each other.

Watching the video indeed showed the solidarity of Ilocanos in Sultan Kudarat during hard times.

This is what Bongbong Marcos referred to in 2016 as part of the Little Solid South. It is composed mostly of towns in North Cotabato, particularly Makilala, Kidapawan, Matalam, Kabacan and Midsayap – the towns where the Ilocano migrants settled.

Kabacan, for example, is said to be 65% of Ilocano heritage.

“We are already here in Mindanao, in the South, but I still feel the presence of the Solid North,” said Marcos in 2016.

Anthropologist Arnold Molina Azurin said that the Solid North may be about vote manipulation and the 3Gs.

“But there is a better wall of appreciation of the Solid North mentality as a cultural survival kit pioneered by migrating and evacuating Ilocano clans far from their homelands,” he said.

“The first farmers brought by the friars and colonialists in Mindanao and Palawan were Ilocanos who were hardy farmers,” he said. “Most important for them was the solidarity in developing their communities and sharing whatever they had during the very lean times. This cultural livelihood solidarity was the Ilocanos’ survival system,” he said.

Molina said that this even became evident among the Ilocanos in Hawaii, California, and Alaska, where they worked as farmers and laborers.

“The Solid North is a very reliable way of maintaining pioneer communities,” he said.

FRANK CIMATU

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Solid North rebounds years after Marcos' exile, death

Opposition bailiwicks in the 1986 snap elections reported over 1,000 incidents of intimidation and violence

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines - During the Martial Law years under the President Ferdinand E. Marcos, not much was done to provoke the Solid North.

One, there were no honest-to-goodness elections to awaken Ilocano pride. Second, it was very hard to manipulate the Ilocano people when the military and Marcos' iron gloves controlled the countryside.

"There is a notion that Ilocos and the rest of the regions were treated more 'fairly and humanely,' hence their continuing support," said University of the Philippines Los Baños sociology professor Reidan Pawilen.

"This has not always been the case," he wrote in "The Solid North Myth: An investigation on the status of dissent and human rights during the Marcos Regime in Regions 1 and 2, 1969-1986."

Pawilen and Berniemack Arellano came out with an atrocity map of the Solid North during Martial Law.

They used the database of the Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission that listed various abuses, ranging from involuntary exile to enforced disappearances or killing, through a 10-point system in the Motu Propio Roll of Victims.

"Based on the data provided, it is shown that even Northern Luzon was not spared [from] these atrocities, thus questioning the notion of a 'one united solid North' narrative," Arellano said.

The two created a map in Filipino and Ilocano, noting that "the map shows that most of the '10 points' human rights abuses occurred in Cagayan Province, with 76 confirmed individuals either missing or killed, followed by Isabela with 50. Ilocos Norte had 22 victims, not yet counting various degrees of abuses like involuntary exile or torture."

Cagayan Province was synonymous with Juan Ponce Enrile, defense secretary of the late dictator Marcos.

Now 98 years old, he will be the oldest Filipino to serve in Cabinet, having been appointed by president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the dictator's son, as chief presidential legal counsel.

The start of Marcos' fall

In hindsight, the start of the fall of the late president Marcos came on August 21, 1983, when opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. was murdered moments after his plane landed at the Manila International Airport.

Only 50 years old at that time, Ninoy was the bright star of the opposition, holding new records as the youngest governor and senator.

In exile in Boston, Aquino knew that Marcos was gravely ill. Despite the risks, he sought to return to revive the opposition.

His wake and burial were attended by a multitude. The subsequent investigation into his murder, though inconclusive, convinced a lot of Filipinos about the culpability of the Marcos regime.

According to a 1988 paper by Luzviminda Tancangco and Roger Mendoza of the UP College of Public Administration, the Aquino assassination “marked a turning point in the two-decade rule of President Ferdinand E. Marcos as it ignited simultaneous and interlocking crises that engulfed an entire nation under a lingering authoritarianism.”

But other political scientists said the crisis started even before the Aquino assassination shook Marcos’ crumbling political base.

“Just as the assassination of Aquino did not cause the financial crisis, it also did not cause the political and moral crises,” said William Overholt in his 1986 article on Asian Survey, “The Rise and Fall of Ferdinand Marcos.”

The financial crisis mentioned here was the effect of the extensive borrowing by the regime to finance its development programs and investment projects and the increasing plunder of the country’s wealth by the Marcos family and cronies.

“They decisively preceded the assassination and were by themselves sufficient to ensure the downfall of Marcos. The assassination focused attention on the pre-existing crises and precipitated broader involvement and more explicit political action. Most notably, it drove the business elite and the clergy to the streets,” Overholt said.

Six years after declaring Martial Law, Marcos in 1978 created the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) or the New Society Movement.

This was an umbrella coalition of mostly right-wing party factions. It killed the traditional two-party system in the Philippines and ushered in a tradition of new presidents consolidating power by making political butterflies of winning politicians.

The Aquino assassination created a political reawakening, which resulted in coalescing the traditional opposition political parties, like the United Nationalist Democratic Organization (Unido) and the Pilipino Democratic Party-Lakas ng Bayan, with nationalist and cause-oriented groups. These resulted in the so-called yellow confetti revolution and the parliament of the streets.

KBL at that time was also wracked with resignations from party members until Marcos had to rely on his Solid North again.

Test case, real case

The May 1984 Batasang Pambansa elections was the test case. The KBL reportedly employed the “overkill strategy” to ensure a supermajority for the Marcoses.

“This enabled Marcos and the KBL to have complete control over the mass media, public programs, services and resources utilized for organizational and campaign purposes as well as in buying political leaders and voters,” Tancangco and Mendoza wrote in “Elections and the Crisis of Legitimacy in the Philippines.”

Marcos also had control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec), the military, civil service, local

governments, and the judiciary during the campaign.

During the elections, voter turnout was high at 89%.

The votes cast for the opposition and independents at 53.3% of the total votes were higher than those of KBL.

But the opposition was able to obtain only 40% of the Batasan seats while KBL got 60% because of "tampering and manipulation of election results."

[Photo: MARCOS FAN. The late international Filipino superstar Wengweng aka Agent 00 appears at a Marcos-Tolentino rally in 1986.]

On November 4, 1985, President Marcos surprisingly called for a special presidential election in February 1986.

Although this was widely seen as a way to acquiesce to pressure from the United States and foreign creditors for continued financial assistance, he was also confident that his control of the entire electoral machinery would buoy him to a new victory.

Still, observers saw this as his hardest political battle.

He chose veteran politician Arturo Tolentino as his running mate. Against them were Aquino's widow Corazon and Salvador Laurel as her running mate.

Marcos again mobilized his extensive KBL machinery and used government funds to underwrite the KBL's campaign.

Over 1,000 incidents of intimidation and violence were reported, mostly in the bailiwicks of the opposition, Tangcangco wrote.

"The use of the 1984 registration list that provided a built-in reserve of about two-million votes for the purposes of the 1986 elections attests to the well-conceived plan of manipulating election results on a wholesale basis during the canvassing stage," Tangcangco and Mendoza said.

"Padding of voters' list was likewise highest in the Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Eastern Visayas, and Mindanao regions, which were acknowledged Marcos' domains."

The authors also said the turnout of voters was particularly low in opposition bailiwicks, like Metro Manila, Southern Tagalog, Bicol, and Western Visayas, while those in KBL bailiwicks like the Solid North "point to an intricate vote addition-vote subtraction strategy designed to maximize Marcos' lead in his traditional strongholds and minimize losses in opposition areas."

Lest it be forgotten, Marcos won the lopsided contest, according to Comelec.

But the resulting whirlwind of events caused by disclosures of cheating and military defection ushered in the non-violent People Power Revolution from February 22 to 25, 1986, culminating in the ouster of the dictator and the apparent dissolution of the KBL and the Solid North.

Death, unexpected rebirth

The joke then was that Marcos agreed to ride the helicopter because he thought he was going to Paoay (where the so-called Malacañang of the North in Ilocos Norte was located), only to learn that he and his entourage were being brought to Hawaii.

In the aftermath of the EDSA People Power revolt, it was as if Paoay and the rest of the Solid North also went into exile with Marcos.

“After the EDSA Revolution, the president left and we who were left behind felt like orphans,” recalled Candon City Mayor Eric Singson, who won as congressman of the 2nd District of Ilocos Sur then.

He said that the late Jose “Sunshine Joe” Aspiras, who was the tourism minister under Marcos and also a member of the 1986 Batasan, gathered all the Solid North congressmen and pondered on their collective future.

“In the next elections, we ran as independents. We used to be KBL, but we were orphaned, so we all ran as independents,” Singson said.

It was at that time Aspiras organized them and formed the Northern Luzon Alliance (NLA).

“I think we were the only one of its kind at that time in the House. We united to pass certain bills, especially those related to the development of the North,” Singson said.

When Aspiras retired from politics and died, it was Luis “Chavit” Singson of the 1st District of Ilocos Sur who replaced him as NLA chair.

After one term, Eric Singson took over for several terms as NLA president, with representatives Victor Ortega of La Union and DV Savellano of Ilocos Sur replacing him.

Eric Singson said that the NLA tried not to rally for a single presidential candidate even if they have Ilocano blood.

When Fidel Ramos won in the 1992 presidential election, he did not take the Solid North even if his roots were in Pangasinan and Ilocos Sur, because others from the Solid North area also ran, like the late Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. and Imelda Marcos, widow of the dictator.

In the 1998 presidential election, the Solid North candidates were Juan Ponce Enrile (Cagayan) and Jose de Venecia (Pangasinan), but they won only in their bailiwicks.

President Joseph Estrada won in the other parts of the Solid North.

The 2004 elections was supposed to be the contest between two Solid North stalwarts, but President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo only won in most parts of the Cordillera and Pampanga, while actor Fernando Poe Jr. got the rest of Solid North and Luzon.

The 2010 elections was a contest between Estrada and eventual president Benigno Aquino III for the Solid North, with Estrada getting the northeastern part and Aquino the northwestern part of Central and Northern Luzon.

Singson said that, at the time, the Northern Luzon Alliance was becoming more blood-driven rather than geographical.

[PHOTO: EXPANDED NORTH. Ilocano legislators in the 10th Congress back president Benigno Aquino III, citing Tarlac as an expansion area for Ilocanos. Courtesy of Eric Singson]

“There were some from Mindanao and other areas who approached me and told me that their father or mother is Ilocano coming from this town. There are also party-list members whose roots are from

the North. We all accepted them,” he said.

The NLA also became more aggressive, he said. “We were recognized as a bloc in the House.”

When there was a plan to unseat President Arroyo, “the NLA was the first group to support her and the others followed,” he added.

“Soon, the other ethnic groups like the Visayans also grouped themselves,” Singson said.

“But when it comes to the reach and loyalty, the NLA is hard to beat,” he said.

FRANK CIMATU

• Rappler.com. Fourth of 5 parts. JUN 28, 2022 8:00 PM PHT:
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/solid-north-rebounds-years-after-ferdinand-marcos-exile-death-part-4/>

From the 3Gs to the 3Ns

New media, nostalgia, and negationism work by helping the Marcos family sanitize their ugly past and Martial Law.

In the 2016 presidential elections, the Solid North predictably acted like a motherless child.

Former vice president Jejomar Binay, being a son of Cagayan Valley, got Northeast Luzon including Kalinga, Apayao, and Abra.

Grace Poe, being the daughter of Fernando Poe Jr., got the rest of the pie, except for Ilocos Norte, which went for eventual winner Rodrigo Duterte.

The vice presidency, however, was another story.

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. won big in all the provinces in Northern and Central Luzon. Leni Robredo beat him only in Tarlac, home turf of then President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, and by only 30,000 votes, and in Batanes where she got four times his votes.

In his home province of Ilocos Norte, Marcos got 96.8% of all VP votes.

In the Ilocos region, Marcos got 84.36% if the battle against Leni was one-on-one. In Cagayan Valley, Marcos’s 2016 votes represented 85% of their combined votes.

In the Cordillera, Marcos got “only” 79% of the votes if it were a two-way fight in 2016. His votes increased by 10% in 2022.

In the rest of the Solid North, his dominance was clear.

The 3Ns

Bongbong was not consistently dominant on entering national politics.

In 1995, four years after the family came home from exile in September 1991, he ran as senator and placed 17th.

He was more successful when he set his sights lower in 2010 and 2013, winning as governor and congressman of his home province Ilocos Norte.

Political consultant and senior lecturer Gerardo Eusebio was a panelist in a November 2013 forum organized by the Third World Studies Center at UP Diliman.

He had also worked with Marcos Jr.'s 2010 senatorial campaign. Marcos garnered 13 million votes in that race to land 7th. In that contest, Marcos ran under the Nacionalista Party, not his father's Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), which had become a ragtag party since the dictator's fall in 1986.

Eusebio recalled that Marcos Jr.'s votes were "definitely concentrated in Region 1: Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, Abra area."

"Metro Manila was not really, you know, a strong Bongbong area. So, doon kami sa Bulacan. We (got a) hint na marami raw loyalists doon sa Bulacan (there was quite a number of loyalists in Bulacan)," he added.

Eusebio said that Regions 7 and 8, the central and eastern Visayas regions, and some parts of Mindanao were also their strongholds. Bongbong's mother, former first lady Imelda, hails from Leyte in Eastern Visayas.

Eusebio said most of their supporters were senior citizens, Kabataang Barangay leaders, and Marcos loyalists.

Eusebio admitted that Martial Law was the albatross on Bongbong's neck.

Without that baggage, he said, the young Marcos could have placed fifth or higher.

What a sea change by 2022.

"Bagong Lipunan," the marching theme of Martial Law, became the de facto campaign jingle of Marcos Jr.

But it wasn't a single giant leap, not a quantum jump for the son.

It was a series of steps that made him win.

'Campaign to exorcise'

In the 2013 forum, Eusebio scoffed at the claim that the 3Gs (guns, goons, and gold) gave Marcos, the father his electoral victories.

Today, to say that the son won because of the 4M formula (man, message, machinery, and money) is also simplistic.

It fails to understand the most important, decisive aspect of elections - the voters.

What fueled the Marcos Jr. strategy these last six years were the 3Ns (new media, nostalgia, and negationism).

Even in 2013, negationism or the "narrative of denial" was already being talked about in the

historical revisionism of the Marcoses.

“And this is probably the issue right now,” Ferdinand Llanes, a history professor at UP Diliman said almost ten years ago, “that accordingly, the Marcoses are exerting every effort to sanitize what is supposed to be a negative image of the Marcoses and Martial Law.”

As early as 2008, Marcos’s team had been producing YouTube videos with strong the negationism slant.

One was entitled “Ferdinand Marcos Still-Working Projects”. It is no longer around but at that time had garnered 40,000 likes.

Another is the “Untold Story of Martial Law [1]” which is still around and has already garnered more than one million views.

Llanes said that the first video showed the supposed achievements of Marcos like the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, and the North and South Expressways. Geothermal plants, San Juanico Bridge, and the Light Rail Transit, stressing that Marcos achieved more than other presidents.

The second one was more controversial because it tried to exculpate Marcos from the assassination of Benigno Aquino.

Llanes mentioned two other examples of negationism among YouTube videos that were forerunners of the prevailing videos now on the video platform and the newer Tiktok.

He said those early videos were part of the “campaign to exorcise” the negative aspects of the Marcoses like the ill-gotten wealth and the Ninoy assassination.

“But for the rest of the population, especially the youth, from those born in 1986 up to the present, hindi na kailangan kasi nasa textbooks,” Llanes said.

“At kapag natapos iyong bata na magbasa, sa pagko-compare ng presidente, considering what’s happening now, Bongbong Marcos could very well win.” Llanes said in 2013.

[Photo: PAYING RESPECTS. Presumptive President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. visits his father, the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. at the latter’s grave in Libingan ng mga Bayani in Taguig City on May 11, 2022. Photo courtesy of Office of Bongbong Marcos.]

Not a dignified choice

Orville Tatcho, a 31-year-old assistant professor at the Department of Communication at the University of the Philippines Baguio, did a qualitative study of about 18 millennials and Zoomers in Baguio. Mostly teachers with some government and NGO workers, their ages ranged from 18 to 30.

Tatcho deliberately chose to have half as pro-BBM and the other against him. He wanted to know what informed their decisions.

He said that those who were pro-BBM were hesitant to admit it.

Tatcho said that in his interviews, it became apparent that social media and textbooks were indeed a big part of their choices.

“Of course, they don’t want to admit it outright but social media is a big factor,” he said.

“From what I observed of those declaring Marcos as their choice, it’s not a dignified choice. What I mean is, they’re really shy to admit that they’re pro-Marcos and they’re really shy to say that their source is social media,” Tatcho added.

He would ask for examples as the term social media was too broad.

“They don’t want to admit that it is TikTok or YouTube but they talk about Tallano gold, how the prestige of the Philippines will be restored, the golden era. So I know that they’re sort of disinformation victims as well,” he added.

Tatcho said that there are prompts that the nostalgia pre-set by the social media propaganda has affected his subjects.

He said that he didn’t delve much on Martial Law - “but phrases like ‘according to my grandparents...’, and ‘People were disciplined before-’ there’s this rhetoric or narrative of discipline during that time. I remember one participant making a parallel between Duterte and Marcos [regime]. Sort of how Duterte set the stage for the possible return of authoritarianism, and at the same time there’s a narrative of how the Igorot prefer disciplined and orderly society... so he has this claim which sort of implies why it’s better with Marcos.”

Kurt Zeus Lequit Dizon, a faculty member of the political science department at Saint Louis University also in Baguio, said that he also sensed this among his students.

“They said that Bongbong is firm like his father, that’s why he is the best among the candidates. But when I asked them to elaborate, they were dismissive,” he said.

Dizon said that he also probed TikTok and YouTube to look into how his students’ opinions were made.

He said that no Ilocanos were speaking the language among the viral videos and said that his students followed so-called influencers who already distilled the messages for them.

“It’s expected that they go for publicity and humor instead of policies among candidates,” he said.

Dizon said that among his relatives in Pangasinan, a big qualification is kailian which means townmate in Ilocano but more related to the generalized “kabayan” among the Tagalogs or “our own.”

He said that this choice by ethnicity could be dangerous because it creates the concept that good politics is feudal.

“It meant that your tribe is superior to others which creates a sort of xenophobia,” he said.

“It’s like because you’re from the Solid North, you despise the Bicolanos because they’re supposed to support Leni Robredo,” Dizon said.

When you get your political ideas from social media instead of reading history books, this is often what happens, he said.

[Photo: HOPES. Former first lady Imelda Marcos joins son, then vice presidential candidate Senator Bongbong Marcos in prayer before voting in Ilocos Norte.]

Nostalgia and amnesia.

When negationism hits its message, historical amnesia follows.

Tatcho said that the answers, especially among the pro-Marcos subjects, confounded him.

“Given that they were high school teachers. I’m imagining what they were teaching during class. There’s even someone taking a Master’s [class] at BSU, so they do have advanced education,” he said.

When confronted about human rights, Tatcho said that they would answer back: “We only hear your version [of the story], what about the other version?” or “You always talk about Manila, what about Ilocos?” So they look for alternative history”

He said that one NGO worker from Mountain Province told him that “it’s possible that there was a mass media shutdown which is why news about human rights abuses didn’t reach them. Of course, I need to verify this but she has a hunch on news media blackouts on these issues.”

He said that it was peaceful in their communities so they said that they were not bothered about the disturbing events in the news.

“Of course, others would say that they’ve read about it but mostly from social media. Others also say that textbooks are extremely one-sided. They framed their arguments as if they were being objective by looking at different sources because all textbooks are anti-Marcos. All presidents have their own faults, according to them. So there’s this false equivalence,” Tatcho said.

To cast doubt on history, Bongbong, just like his father, decided to recast history according to his narrative.

In the Bongbong Marcos Biography, he tried to focus on his post-EDSA achievements, mostly his being a governor and congressman in Ilocos Norte. For someone heavily banking on the achievements of his father rubbing on to him, that is a tall order.

Before it was corrected, he faked his educational attainments and also did not mention that he lost in his senatorial bid in 1995 to make it look like he never lost an election, including his vice presidential bid in 2016.

Even before Facebook, Bongbong already had a Friendster profile since March 2004 for his senatorial bid.

He had a link to an Internet game called “Windmill City” to make it appear that the Bangui Windmill Farm was his idea all along.

Among the earliest Facebook groups set up by Bongbong’s team, however, was the Marcos Loyalist, which started in 2013. From only 10,000 at the start of 2014, it has now grown to 216,000 members.

Because it has since become a public group and anyone can post, it has become a belligerent and a noisy echo chamber.

But at the start, Marcos Loyalist, like most Marcos FB groups then, was into Martial Law.

In one forum, I identified the posts on that page in its first two years: 25 photos of Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, 14 of Imelda, 15 photos of the Marcos couple, 12 photos of the Marcos family, ten photos of the young Bongbong, six of the 50-year-old Bongbong, five photos of the father and son, three of the mother and son and 25 photos of the achievements of New Society.

At first, the members of the page were Ilocanos from the Solid North. Because now they have a roll-call, most are still from the region but many were also OFWs and some were from Mindanao.

So it comes as no surprise that, eight years later, when Tatcho asked his subjects about Marcos the father, he said that they were all praises.

“It came to the point where there’s this one participant who I asked, “Why is BBM so popular right now? Where does the appeal come from?” He said, “From his father.”

“So without his father, BBM can’t stand on his own?” The participant said “No.”

So they know, they recognize.”

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- Rappler.com. Last of 5 parts. JUN 29, 2022 8:00 PM PHT:
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/solid-north-marcos-jr-victory-guns-goons-gold-new-media-nostalgia-negationism-part-5/>
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P.S.

- “The Marcos victory”. This series was made possible by Internews.
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Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6Imb00sqyY>