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Ferdinand Marcos, in full **Ferdinand Edralin Marcos**, (born September 11, 1917, Sarrat, Philippines—died September 28, 1989, [Honolulu](#), Hawaii, U.S.), Philippine lawyer and politician who, as head of state from 1966 to 1986, established an [authoritarian](#) regime in the [Philippines](#) that came under [criticism](#) for corruption and for its suppression of democratic processes.

Marcos attended school in [Manila](#) and studied [law](#) in the late 1930s at the University of the Philippines, near that city. Tried for the assassination in 1933 of a political opponent of his politician father, Marcos was found guilty in November 1939. But he argued his case on appeal to the Philippine Supreme Court and won acquittal a year later. He became a trial lawyer in Manila. During [World War II](#) he was an officer with the Philippine armed forces. Marcos's later claims of having been a leader in the Filipino guerrilla resistance movement were a central factor in his political success, but U.S. government archives revealed that he actually played little or no part in anti-Japanese activities during 1942–45.



From 1946 to 1947 Marcos was a technical assistant to [Manuel Roxas](#), the first [president](#) of the independent Philippine republic. He was a member of the House of Representatives (1949–59) and of the Senate (1959–65), serving as Senate president (1963–65). In 1965 Marcos, who was a prominent member of the Liberal Party founded by Roxas, broke with it after failing to get his party's nomination for president. He then ran as the [Nationalist Party](#) candidate for president against the Liberal president, [Diosdado Macapagal](#). The campaign was expensive and bitter. Marcos won and was inaugurated as president on December 30, 1965. In 1969 he was reelected, becoming the first Philippine president to serve a second term. During his first term he had made progress in agriculture, industry, and education. Yet his administration was troubled by increasing student demonstrations and violent urban guerrilla activities.

On September 21, 1972, Marcos imposed [martial law](#) on the Philippines. Holding that communist and subversive forces had precipitated the crisis, he acted swiftly; opposition politicians were jailed, and the armed forces became an arm of the regime. Opposed by political leaders—notably [Benigno Aquino, Jr.](#), who was jailed and held in detention for almost eight years—Marcos was also criticized by church leaders and others. In the provinces Maoist communists ([New People's Army](#)) and Muslim separatists (notably of the [Moro National Liberation Front](#)) undertook guerrilla activities intended to bring down the central government. Under martial law the president assumed extraordinary powers, including the ability to suspend the writ of [habeas corpus](#). Marcos announced the end of martial law in January 1981, but he continued to rule in an [authoritarian](#) fashion under various [constitutional](#) formats. He won election to the newly created post of president against token opposition in June 1981.





Philippine and U.S. dignitaries

Philippine and U.S. dignitaries—(from left) Philippine Foreign Minister Carlos P. Romulo, U.S. Ambassador Richard W. Murphy, Philippine Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos, Imelda Marcos, and U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David C. Jones—attending a ceremony at Clark Air Base in central Luzon, Philippines, 1979.

Image: Al Ramones & Domie Quiazon//U.S. Department of Defense

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Marcos's wife from 1954 was [Imelda Romuáldez Marcos](#), a former beauty queen. Imelda became a powerful figure after the institution of martial law in 1972. She was often criticized for her appointments of relatives to lucrative governmental and industrial positions while she held the posts of governor of Metropolitan Manila (1975–86) and minister of human settlements and ecology (1979–86).

Marcos's later years in power were marred by rampant government corruption, economic stagnation, the steady widening of economic inequalities between the rich and the poor, and the steady growth of a communist guerrilla insurgency active in the rural areas of the Philippines' innumerable islands.



By 1983 Marcos's health was beginning to fail, and opposition to his rule was growing. Hoping to present an [alternative](#) to both Marcos and the increasingly powerful New People's Army, [Benigno Aquino, Jr.](#), returned to Manila on [August 21, 1983](#), only to be shot dead as he stepped off the airplane. The assassination was seen as the work of the government and touched off massive antigovernment protests. An independent commission appointed by Marcos concluded in 1984 that high military officers were responsible for Aquino's assassination. To reassert his [mandate](#), Marcos called for presidential elections to be held in 1986. But a [formidable](#) political opponent soon emerged in Aquino's widow, [Corazon Aquino](#), who became the presidential candidate of the opposition. It was widely asserted that Marcos managed to defeat Aquino and retain the presidency in the election of February 7, 1986, only through massive voting fraud on the part of his supporters. Deeply discredited at home and abroad by his dubious electoral victory, Marcos held fast to his presidency as the Philippine military split between supporters of his and of Aquino's [legitimate](#) right to the presidency. A tense standoff that ensued between the two sides ended only when Marcos fled the [country](#) on February 25, 1986, at U.S. urging. He went into exile in [Hawaii](#), where he remained until his death.





Ferdinand Marcos

Ferdinand Marcos waving, 1983.

Image: A1C Virgil C. Zurbruegg//U.S. Department of Defense

Evidence emerged that during his years in power Marcos, his family, and his close associates had looted the Philippines' economy of billions of dollars through embezzlements and other corrupt practices. Marcos and his wife were subsequently indicted by the U.S. government on racketeering charges, but in 1990 (after Marcos's death) Imelda was acquitted of all charges by a federal court. She was allowed to return to the Philippines in 1991, and in 1993 a Philippine court found her guilty of corruption (the conviction was overturned in 1998).

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