

Philippine Presidents: Their Achievements and Contributions (Updated)

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Presidents Day

Since independence in 1898 and the ratification of the Philippine Constitution in the First Republic, there have been 16 presidents. Starting with General Emilio Aguinaldo all the way to current president Rodrigo Duterte, this article details each president's particular contributions and achievements while in office.

1. Emilio Aguinaldo 1899-1901



One way to remember the first president of the Philippines First Republic is to look at the five peso coin. Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo's face used to grace the five peso bill (which is not used anymore). The back of the bill shows him holding the Philippine flag at the celebration of the Philippine Independence Day.

Achievements, Contributions and Legacies:

- first (and only) president of the First Republic (Malolos Republic)
- signed the Pact of Biak-na-Bato, creating a truce between the Spanish and Philippine revolutionaries
- known as the President of the Revolutionary Government
- led the Philippines in the Spanish-Philippine War and the American-Philippine War
- youngest president, taking office at age 28
- longest-lived president, passing away at 94

2. Manuel L. Quezon, 1935-1944



After 34 years of Insular Government under American rule, Philippine voters elected Manuel Luis Quezon first president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines. He is known as the “Father of National Language” (Ama ng Wikang Pambansa). He died of tuberculosis in Saranac Lake, New York.

Achievements, Contributions and Legacies:

- first Senate president elected as President of the Philippines
- first president elected through a national election
- first president under the Commonwealth
- created National Council of Education
- initiated women’s suffrage in the Philippines during the Commonwealth
- approved Tagalog/Filipino as the national language of the Philippines
- appears on the twenty-peso bill
- a province, a city, a bridge and a university in Manila are named after him
- his body lies within the special monument on Quezon Memorial Circle
- accepted some 1300 jewish refugees, thus saving their lives from the "holocaust"

3. José P. Laurel, 1943-1945



José P. Laurel's presidency is controversial. He was officially the government's caretaker during the Japanese occupation of World War II. Criticized as a traitor by some, his indictment for treason was superseded later by an amnesty proclamation in 1948.

Achievements, Contributions and Legacies:

- since the early 1960s, Laurel considered a legitimate president of the Philippines

- organized KALIBAPI (Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas, or Association for Service to the New Philippines), a provisional government during Japanese occupation
- declared Martial Law and war between the Philippines and the U.S./United Kingdom in 1944
- with his family, established the Lyceum of the Philippines

4. Sergio Osmeña, 1944-1946



Sergio Osmeña was the second president of the Commonwealth. During his presidency, the Philippines joined the International Monetary Fund.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- became president at 65, making him the oldest person to hold office
- first Visayan to become president
- joined with U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Leyte on October 20, 1944 to begin restoration of Philippine freedom after Japanese occupation
- Philippine National Bank was rehabilitated and the country joined the International Monetary Fund during his presidency
- Bell Trade Act was approved by the U.S. Congress during his presidency
- appears on the 50-peso bill

5. Manuel Roxas, 1946-1948



Manuel Roxas was the fifth president of the Philippines: the third (and last) president under the Commonwealth, and the first president of the Third Republic of the Philippines. He held office for only one year, 10 months, and 18 days.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- inaugurated as the first president of the new Republic after World War II

- reconstruction from war damage and life without foreign rule began during his presidency
- under his term, the Philippine Rehabilitation Act and Philippine Trade Act laws were accepted by Congress
- appears on the 100-peso bill

6. Elpidio Quirino, 1948-1953



Elpidio Quirino served as vice president under Manuel Roxas. When Roxas died in 1948, Quirino became president.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- Hukbalahap guerrilla movement active during his presidency
- created Social Security Commission
- created Integrity Board to monitor graft and corruption
- Quezon City became capital of the Philippines in 1948

7. Ramon Magsaysay, 1953-1957



Ramon Magsaysay was born in Iba, Zambales. He was a military governor and an engineer. He died in an aircraft disaster while boarding the presidential plane.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- Hukbalahap movement quelled during his presidency
- chairman of the Committee on Guerilla Affairs
- first president sworn into office wearing Barong Tagalog during inauguration
- presidency referred to as the Philippines' "Golden Years" for its lack of corruption
- Philippines was ranked second in Asia's clean and well-governed countries during his presidency

- established National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) among other agrarian reforms

8. Carlos P. Garcia, 1957-1961



A lawyer, poet, and teacher, Carlos P. Garcia also served as a guerilla leader during the Pacific War. Born in Bohol, Garcia serviced as vice president under Ramon Magsaysay and as secretary of Foreign Affairs for four years. He became president when Magsaysay died in 1957.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- known for "Filipino First Policy," which favored Filipino businesses over foreign investors
- established the Austerity Program focusing on Filipino trade and commerce
- known as the "Prince of Visayan Poets" and the "Bard from Bohol"
- cultural arts was revived during his term
- was the first president to have his remains buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani

9. Diosdado Macapagal, 1961-1965



Born in Lubao, Pampanga, Diosdado Macapagal was a lawyer and professor. His daughter Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was the 14th, and second female, president of the Philippines.

Contribution, Achievements and Notable Events:

- established the first Land Reform Law, allowing for the purchase of private farmland to be distributed in inexpensive, small lots to the landless
- placed the Philippine peso on the currency exchange market
- declared June 12, 1898 to be Philippines' Independence Day
- signed the Minimum Wage Law
- created the Philippine Veteran's Bank

- currently on the 200-peso bill

10. Ferdinand Marcos, 1965-1986



Born in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, Ferdinand Edralin Marcos was a lawyer and Senate President for three years. He was president for 21 years. He ruled under martial law and his dictatorship was known for its corruption and brutality. Marcos was removed from office after the People Power Revolution.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- first president to win a second term
- before and during his first term, the Philippines was the second largest economy in Asia, behind only Japan
- declared Martial Law on Sept. 22, 1972
- increased the size of Philippine military and armed forces
- by 1980 the Philippine GNP was four times greater than 1972
- by 1986 the Philippines was one of the most indebted countries in Asia
- built more schools, roads, bridges, hospitals, and other infrastructure than all former presidents combined (note: he was the longest serving president)
- ~~the only president whose remains are interred inside a refrigerated crypt~~

11. Corazon Aquino, 1986-1992



The first woman president of the Philippines and the first woman to become president of an Asian country, Corazon Aquino was born in Paniqui, Tarlac. She was a prominent figure in the People Power Revolution that brought down Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. Her husband, Benigno Aquino Jr., was a senator during the Marcos regime and its strongest critic. He was assassinated while Marcos was still in power.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- first woman to be president of the Philippines or any Asian country
- restored democracy
- abolished the 1973 Marcos Constitution and ushered in the new Constitution of the Philippines
- reorganized the structure of the executive branch of government
- signed the Family Code of 1987, a major civil law reform, and 1191 Local Government Code, which reorganized the structure of the executive branch of government
- initiated charitable and social activities helping the poor and the needy
- named "Woman of the Year" in 1986 by Time magazine
- on the new 500-peso bill together with her husband Benigno Aquino
- Received honors and awards including: 100 Women Who Shaped World History, 20 Most Influential Asians of the 20th Century, 65 Great Asian Heroes, J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding

12. Fidel V. Ramos, 1992-1998



Fidel V. Ramos was the chief-of-staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines before he became president. He was also a civil engineer. As president, he restored economic growth and stability in the country, even during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. He is the first, and so far the only, non-Catholic president of the Philippines.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- oversaw Philippine economic growth
- presided over celebrations of Philippine Independence Centennial in 1998
- received British Knighthood from the United Kingdom by Queen Elizabeth II (Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George)
- hosted the fourth Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Leader's Summit in the Philippines in 1996
- Philippine Stock Exchange became an international favorite during his presidency
- death penalty reinstated while he was in office
- signed peace agreement with the rebel Moro National Liberation Front

13. Joseph Estrada, 1998-2001



Known as Erap, Joseph Estrada was the first president who had been a famous film actor. His presidency was controversial. During his years in office economic growth was slow and he faced impeachment proceedings. He was ousted from the presidency in 2001. He was later convicted of stealing from the government but was pardoned. He ran unsuccessfully for president in 2010.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- during his presidency Moro Islamic Liberation Front headquarters and camps were captured
- joined other leaders and politicians to try to amend the 1987 Constitution
- cited as one of the Three Outstanding Senators in 1989
- among the "Magnificent 12" who voted to terminate the agreement that allows for U.S. control of Clark Airbase and Subic Naval Base

14. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, 2001-2010



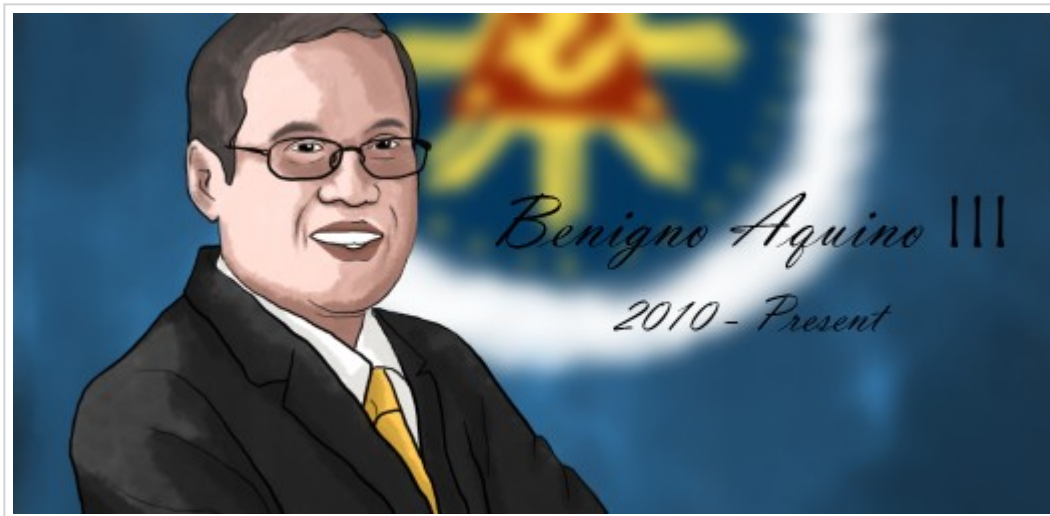
Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was the 14th, president of the Philippines (and the second female president). The Oakwood Mutiny occurred during her term. Arroyo oversaw road and infrastructure improvements and higher economic growth than presidents before her, but there was also controversy. The so-called "Hello Garci" controversy involved recordings that allegedly captured Arroyo ordering the rigging of the election that put her in office. In 2005 Arroyo faced impeachment proceedings related to the recordings but the impeachment failed. After she had left office Arroyo faced additional charges of election fraud and misuse of state funds.

Contributions, Achievements and Notable Events:

- second female president of the country
- first and only female vice-president of the Philippines so far
- first president to take oath outside Luzon
- former Economics professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, where current president Benigno Aquino III was one of her students

- ex-classmate of former U.S. President Bill Clinton at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, where she maintained Dean's list status
- oversaw higher economic growth than the past three presidents before her
- peso became the best-performing currency of the year in Asia in 2007
- eVAT Law was implemented under her term

15. Benigno Simeon Aquino III, 2010-2016



Benigno Aquino III was sworn into office as the fifteenth President of the Philippines. He joined the House of Representatives and the Senate before his presidency. He is the first president who is a bachelor; he is unmarried and has no children.

Achievements, Contributions and Legacies:

- initiated K-12 education in the Philippines
- in 2013, the Philippines wins its first investment-grade credit rating from Fitch Ratings, similar upgrades from other credit rating agencies Moody's and Standard and Poor's follow later that year
- changed the Philippines' reputation as "the sick man of Asia" to "brightest spot in Asia"
- oversaw higher economic growth than his predecessors
- signed a landmark law mandating the state provide free contraceptives to poor couples and teach sex education in schools
- filed a suit at a UN-linked international arbitration tribunal in the Hague to invalidate China's claim of Philippine claimed territories in the West Philippine Sea
- initiated an unprecedented scale of military upgrade. He improved the Armed Forces' operational conditions by introducing new and used assets at a rate that far outpaced previous presidents.



16. Rodrigo Roa Duterte, 2016-Present



Rodrigo Duterte, former mayor of Davao, ascended to the presidency through a populist movement. His main campaign slogan was "change is coming" and vowed to fight/eradicate criminality and drugs within 3-6 months.

Achievements, Contributions and Significant Events:

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration awarded a landmark victory to the Philippines, it has won on almost all of its arguments against China
- instigated the foreign policy shift, from being a pro - US ally, to a more independent stance (or a pro - China stance)
- Bloody war on drugs. He lived up to his promise of a “relentless” anti-drugs campaign
- instituted a tax reform law. A revenue-generating measure to fund the administration’s infrastructure program, health, education, and social services programs
- proposed Build, Build, Build! Infrastructure Plan which seeks to accelerate infrastructure spending and develop industries that will yield robust growth, create jobs and improve the lives of Filipinos.
- Environmental policies. Initiated a rehabilitation on Boracay, jump-started efforts to clean Manila Bay and Laguna Lake and got Canada to take back its illegal garbage stranded in the Philippines



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