

## **A Beauvoirian Interpretation of the Philippine Pink Movement**

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### **Abstract**

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argued that the emancipation of women could not be met through mere political and economic liberation but through freedom of gender identity from the patriarchy. Beauvoir argued that women must veer away from two tendencies: first, emulating men to be in an equal position of power, and second, being feminized by patriarchal ideals. Beauvoir's timeless argument was evident through the recent 2022 Presidential Elections through the rivalry between Marcos' patriarch Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. and then-outgoing Vice-President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo. This paper, thus, examines the enigmatic Robredo and the Pink Movement—one that opposes the Marcos family and past President Rodrigo Duterte. This paper argues that in her fight against the two patriarchies, Robredo succumbed to inferiority for reinforcing specific feminine images. While the political inclination of Filipinos towards machismo played a vital role, such perception was also self-inflicted by the movement. Robredo's political ascent and allegiance with patriarchal elites intrinsically links her political career to the notion of the *eternal feminine*.

**Keywords:** Beauvoir, Feminism, Marcos, Robredo, Duterte

## Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex: Woman as the Other*, is a phenomenological work that covers the gendered and sexual experiences of women in a patriarchal society. One of the main contributions of Beauvoir was offering an answer to her book's most pressing question: how can women achieve emancipation from preconceived notions of their gender identity and sexuality? In her concluding chapter, Beauvoir states that women's liberation will only be possible if their essence is not inherently tied to men, allowing them to pursue an independent existence that transcends their gender identity, neither submitting nor aiming to destroy men.<sup>1</sup> Beauvoir calls this the state of recognizing each other as peers or equals wherein both genders coexist as an other for the other.<sup>2</sup> Through Beauvoir's idea of reciprocal recognition. Both genders achieving genuine camaraderie or friendship is based on acknowledgment—man and woman avoid tension and instead arrive at a sustained truce.<sup>3</sup>

The timelessness of Beauvoir's vision towards women's emancipation can be seen in one of the most prominent political movements in 21st Century Philippine politics—the Pink Movement. Spearheaded by then outgoing Vice-President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo, the movement was an opposition directed against the Dutertes and Marcoses—two of the most powerful patriarchies in the country that embodied traditional, conservative, and more pressingly, illiberal politics.<sup>4</sup> Then President Rodrigo Duterte ushered a new age of populist strongman politics with machismo, sexism, and *crass politics* at the forefront of his branding.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, presidential candidate

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex: Women as the Other*, translated by H.M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 686.

<sup>3</sup> Ellie Anderson, “From Existential Alterity to Ethical Reciprocity: Beauvoir's Alternative to Levinas,” *Continental Philosophy* 52, no. 2(2019): 171-189.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Thompson, “1. The Rise of Illiberal Democracy in the Philippines: Duterte's Early Presidency,” in *From Aquino II to Duterte (2010-2018)*, edited by Imelda Deinla and Björn Dressel (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019) 39-61.

<sup>5</sup> Nicole Curato, “We Need to Talk About Rody,” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency*, edited by Nicole Curato (Manila: Bughaw, 2017).

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. is the lone son of the late dictator, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. The older Marcos’ dictatorial rule was infamous for abusing martial law to usher in governance that used fear to control public opinion in favor of his regime.<sup>6</sup>

While Robredo and the Pink Movement’s fight against Duterte and Marcos is primarily a fight to restore democratic and liberal values, it is likewise a feminist movement.<sup>7</sup> Robredo championed compassion, equality, and progressiveness, best seen in the Pink Movement’s slogan, “*sa goybernong tapat, angat buhay lahat*” (lit: trustworthy governance, prosperity for all). Here, she focuses on marginalized groups that fell victim to Duterte’s regime, whether the poor, the indigenous, the middle class, or the women. Ultimately, however, what became most apparent in the Pink Movement was that it was a woman’s fight—Robredo’s—seen primarily in promoting her as a political figure.

This paper investigates the gendered contrast between Robredo as a woman pitted against two patriarchs, Duterte and Marcos. Such political circumstance makes Beauvoir’s vision (and warnings) regarding women’s emancipation apparent. Duterte and Marcos comfortably gunned for presidencies without any resistance to their essence as politicians—whereas Robredo was constantly bombarded with controversies that were ultimately connected to gender stereotypes reserved only for women.<sup>8</sup> The experiences of Robredo remind us of Beauvoir’s exposition—that women, despite civil and economic liberation, are still inherently viewed as inferior to men, objectified and subconsciously enslaved due to the deep-rooted political dominance of patriarchy—hence, an *Other* in which man is the self and *subject*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> William Overholt, “The Rise and Fall of Ferdinand Marcos,” *Asian Survey* 26, no. 11 (1986): 1138-1148.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Wong, “Leni Robredo’s Gendered Fight for the Philippine Presidency” Australian Institute of International Affairs, May 4, 2022 <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/leni-robredos-gendered-fight-for-the-philippine-presidency>

<sup>8</sup> Ninotchka Rosca, “Phenomenally Pink: Robredo’s Campaign for the Presidency Bucks Gender.

<sup>9</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 643-646.

Beauvoir lays out two types of women amidst this socio-political reality women face: the feminine woman and the modern woman. The feminine woman is a female socialized to be *prey* for men, embracing the social construction of what a woman is based on the ideals of patriarchy. This feminization of women is problematic for Beauvoir, as this puts women in a position of submissiveness—a primary reason the patriarchy has continued to dictate the existential meaning of womanhood. By embracing feminine norms, Beauvoir argues that women submit themselves to bondage unconsciously rather than achieve true emancipation from their gender identity. On the other hand, Beauvoir’s modern woman accepts the reality of masculine dominance and, thus, strives for equality despite this reality. Beauvoir warns against this as well. Since society has always been structured to favor men, women’s pursuit of equality will create a “state of war” with the patriarchy.<sup>10</sup>

For Beauvoir, modern women will struggle to play on equal, masculine terms with men. While the modern woman wishes to free herself from the notions of the feminine, she may confuse herself in this endeavor. Her reliance on her femininity, her “old magic,” to garner support from men will create irony.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, distrust manifests among men in treating women as equals—and thus, the endless conflict between the two sexes emerges.<sup>12</sup> Beauvoir, however, did not leave this issue unattended, as she offered arguments on how women can liberate themselves from their gender identity. As she emphasized in previous chapters, Beauvoir believed that the key to a woman’s liberation is her socialization with the world through her body and sexuality. Beauvoir also argued for an overhaul of patriarchal perceptions and the obliteration of the *myth of the eternal feminine*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674.

<sup>11</sup> Beauvoir implies that women may use their feminine sexuality and mix it with their newfound political liberation to succeed—something that will trigger conflict with men due to its contradictory nature.

<sup>12</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 675.

<sup>13</sup> Debra Begroffen and Megan Burke, “Simone de Beauvoir” in *Stanford of Encyclopedia in Philosophy*, Accessed March 3, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=beauvoir>

Beauvoir's two types of women and her vision to abolish the eternal feminine will be the foundation of the analysis of Robredo and the Pink Movement. Using this framework to examine the modern conflict between the patriarchal man and the liberated woman, we can see the dilemma female leaders such as Robredo face. In a hyper-masculine political arena where the goal is to gain public trust, Robredo—like many other female politicians before her—walks on thin ice in proving her competence compared to her male contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Robredo must acknowledge preconceived notions of her existence as a woman and embrace feminine values such as care and integrity (the feminine). On the other hand, she must also project a certain charisma to show her competence and assertiveness as a leader (the modern).

These two contrasting values that subject women create a paradox for Robredo, which thereby played a critical role in diminishing her image as a politician, especially when compared to the simplistic, macho branding that Duterte and Marcos enjoyed. However, this paradox did not simply arise from the controversies thrown by Robredo's political foes, as it was manifested internally by Robredo and the Pink Movement itself—whether intentionally or not. Hence, we also argue that most of the gendered controversies thrown were self-inflicted—stemming mainly from Robredo's problematic allegiance and ties to patriarchs that created public suspicion about her image as a politician. Notably, this paper identifies three images of Robredo—first, *Robredo as the Widow*; second, *Robredo as an Anti-Dutertismo Icon*; third, *Robredo as the Caring Mother*.

The structure of this paper is as follows: in the second part, we give a political context as to how Robredo created a career in public service that led to the Pink Movement. It is crucial first to analyze this because we can trace the root of the Pink Movement to Robredo's image as a politician. Hence, by looking at her roots, rise to political relevance, and all the nuances attached to her name, we can divulge certain perceptions and stereotypes tied to her image as a female political

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<sup>14</sup> Carmencita Aguilar, "Challenges to Women Politicians in a Democratized Society: In Case of the Philippines," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 11, no. 1(1998): 119-138.

figure. This paper's second part expounds on the first two images of Robredo, *The Widow*, and *The Anti-Dutertismo Icon*. In the third section, the paper focuses on the Pink Movement's fight against Marcos Jr. It breaks down the political decisions that transpired before and after its inception, along with the consequences that were born from it. By doing so, the paper analyzes Robredo's state of paradox in the holistic, culminating sense by unraveling key areas where the feminine and modern woman were manifested and exploited by the Philippines' patriarchy. The paper then discusses the third and last image of Robredo, *The Caring Mother*. In the fourth and final section, we suggest systematic approaches on how the nation can empower women to navigate the hyper-masculine political landscape of the Philippines, contributing new insights to help overcome challenges brought forth by patriarchal oppression.

### **The Roots of Robredo and The Pink Movement**

The Pink Movement began during the 2022 Philippine Presidential Elections. At a glance, one may conclude that the movement served as the battle cry of a desperate opposition against the soaring popularity of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.—the only son of the late despot, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. However, the Pink Movement's roots can be traced even before Marcos Jr. expressed his intention to run for the presidency. It is a movement also born out of the accumulated frustrations towards the previous regime of outgoing president Duterte. Since his candidacy in 2015, Duterte has become a political symbol of the country's shift towards stark ideologies from past years.<sup>15</sup> This is given great emphasis in his populist brand of macho

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<sup>15</sup> In Curato's "We Need to Talk About Rody," Duterte's ideologies were stated to be anchored on *citizen-led political action* that focused on the promise of change. While change has always been a staple in political campaigns, Duterte tapped into the underlying concerns of Filipinos that grew stronger during the presidencies of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III. Both Aquino and Macapagal-Arroyo were economists and had a liberal inclination towards international affairs. Duterte, on the other hand, focused on grassroots issues that he deemed as national concerns. Such examples were peace and order (e.g., local drug problem and Mindanao's unrest), heavy traffic, and decentralizing Metro Manila to promote prosperity to provinces.

governance.<sup>16</sup> The Philippines has always been patriarchal, stemming from its colonial past.<sup>17</sup> However, Duterte's soaring popularity gave birth to a populist ideology called *Dutertismo*, fostering illiberal values with sexism and machismo at the forefront. Duterte's inclination towards patriarchal and authoritarian ideologies created a gendered problem in the Philippines. In a time when conservative politics are becoming favored, women's freedoms are challenged more due to the moral prescriptions that *Dutertismo* has nurtured.

As president, Duterte has publicly exclaimed misogynistic remarks on rape, women's attires, and their leadership capabilities. In dealing with female rebels, Duterte once told the military: "Tell them—there is a new order from the mayor. We won't kill you. We will just shoot your vagina—if there is no vagina, it would be useless."<sup>18</sup> While controversial in media outlets, such remarks did not incite much public controversy in a broader sense. If leaders from more progressive countries say misogynistic remarks like Duterte, they may jeopardize their position and lose public trust. Duterte, however, managed to stay unscathed and maintain public popularity. In a vacuum, Duterte's sexism, coupled with his popularity as president, ultimately revitalized a long-standing conservative ideology in Philippine politics—that women are inferior to men, most especially in leadership roles.<sup>19</sup> One of the most prominent examples of this gender binary can be found between the constant clashes in ideologies of the patriarchal and conservative Duterte and the feminist and progressive Robredo, along with her fellow feminist and liberal allies in Senator Risa Hontiveros

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<sup>16</sup> Maria Tanyag, "Duterte, Hypermasculinity, and the Key to Populism" Australian Institute of International Affairs, March 6, 2018, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/duterte-governing-hypermasculinity-philippines/>

<sup>17</sup> Veronica Alphora, Meggan Evangelista, Mylene Hega, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in the Philippines: Struggles, Challenges, Advances*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Emily Rauhala, "Rodrigo Duterte tells soldiers to shoot female rebels in the vagina," *The Independent*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-soldiers-shoot-female-rebels-vagina-philippines-drugs-war-a8206501.html>

<sup>19</sup> Duterte has explicitly said this, most prominently when he said women are not fit for presidencies due to their emotional differences compared to men.

and former Senator Leila De Lima.<sup>20</sup> These clashing ideals, coupled with Marcos Jr. being the favored presidential successor of Duterte, ultimately led to the Pink Movement. The Pink Movement was an antithesis to both Dutertismo and Marcos Jr.'s link to the dictatorship history in the country.

While the Pink Movement was formed due to the shift in politics favoring Duterte and Marcos Jr.'s populist politics, the very bedrock of this movement was defined not as a political contrast to their platforms but rather through the ideologies and principles of Robredo as its leader. Hence, it is essential to discuss the formation of Robredo as a politician in conjunction with the Pink Movement, especially in the context of Philippine politics, where the success of elections heavily relies on the appeal of a politician instead of the party itself—a patron-client relationship.<sup>21</sup> To start, we must look into three definitive experiences of Robredo's political career: 1) her entry into the national political limelight and what preceded it, 2) her being the Vice-President of the Philippines from 2016-2022, and 3) her branding as a presidential candidate in 2021.

Analyzing these three experiences will lead us to the three images that were shaped toward Robredo and, subsequently, the Pink Movement. Since we established that the Pink Movement hinges (intrinsically) on Robredo's image, we can confirm the logical assumption that whatever is perceived about Robredo will be perceived about the Pink Movement.<sup>22</sup> Since unified support towards Robredo preceded the birth of the Pink Movement, we can also say that although the movement required Duterte and Marcos Jr.'s influence for it to be born, Robredo herself is the very root of such a movement—that if we swap her presidential candidacy with a different politician, the movement will inherently be different as well.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Robredo, De Lima, and Hontiveros all won a seat during the 2016 Philippine Elections under a coalition formed by the Liberal Party.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan Quimpo, *THE PHILIPPINES: Political Parties and Corruption*, Southeast Asian Affairs, 277-294, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> To reiterate, the three images we argue in this paper are *Robredo as a Widow*, *Robredo as an Anti-Dutertismo Icon*, and *Robredo as a Caring Mother*.

<sup>23</sup> A politician being the root and bedrock of a political movement is not rare in Philippine politics—we can even say it is quite normal. We can see these in other



## Robredo as the Widow

Now that we have established Robredo's importance to the movement, we now look at the three experiences that defined her image, both as a politician and a *woman working as a politician*. First, we look into Robredo's entry into the political limelight and what preceded it; likewise, we will bring up the first image: *Robredo as the Widow*. Here, we will focus on how Robredo became a daily political figure to the Filipino national public rather than just becoming a public official. Robredo entered the national limelight through her candidacy for the Philippines' vice presidency during the 2016 elections. Robredo ran under the Liberal Party, endorsed by the incumbent president, Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III. Manuel "Mar" Roxas II was gunning for the presidency with her. Roxas is a political mainstay who served several terms as senator and cabinet secretary under Aquino.

Preceding her clear allegiance with Roxas, Aquino, and the Liberal Party, we could say Robredo was relatively unknown in the national political sphere. The most significant position she held prior was being the 3rd District Representative of Camarines Sur Province—a position that is obscured from national interest. Before this, Robredo was a human rights lawyer. As we mentioned, her entry into public office (being elected to Congress) only started in 2013, when she was already 48. So, how and why did Robredo enter into public office this late in her life? While it is common practice for politicians to be groomed into public service early, Robredo's late entry can be traced primarily to her husband Jesse Robredo's untimely death. Unlike Leni Robredo, Jesse Robredo was a political veteran, having served a full term as mayor of Naga City in Camarines Sur at 29. His political popularity skyrocketed when he was appointed as the Secretary for the Department of Interior Local Government (DILG), handpicked by then-President Noynoy Aquino.<sup>24</sup> He served in this role until he died in 2012 from a tragic plane crash. Because of his death, a burgeoning political

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movements like the Aquinos during Martial Law in the 1980s, and Duterte's "*Change is Coming*" movement during his presidential candidacy in 2016.

<sup>24</sup> In the Philippine context, becoming a DILG secretary is a major part of a politician's career, as it is a position that can be a springboard towards vice-presidency or presidency.

force was lost not only among Liberal Party members but also in Jesse Robredo's bailiwick of Naga City, the province of Camarines Sur, and the entire Bicol Region.

Herein lies the first of the three images of Robredo as dictated by the patriarchy. Robredo's beginnings as a politician are already problematic (in Beauvoirian theory) because *Leni Robredo, the Female Politician* succeeded her late husband, *Jesse Robredo, the Politician*. Recall earlier, we established Beauvoir's stance that women are regarded as an *Other*, where men are the *I*—the *subject*.<sup>25</sup>

With Jesse Robredo being regarded as an up-and-coming politician in the national sphere during the 2010s, it can be gathered that Leni entered the political fray as a mere *replacement*—a stopgap—in filling the shoes of a successful man. This was made more problematic by Leni's relationship with Jesse—they being husband and wife. In other cases, take, for example, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo; we can say that she is only following in the footsteps of her father's legacy (former President Diosdado Macapagal Arroyo).<sup>26</sup> This relationship is less binding on Macapagal-Arroyo's image as a woman and politician. However, in Beauvoirian theory, the husband-wife relationship is the most oppressive form of relationship for women due to the sheer number of normalized stereotypes formed from being a wife. Such a relationship fosters a state of immanence where their purpose is tied to their husbands.

While we can argue that Leni Robredo was not domesticated and feminized in the Beauvoirian sense, it is still evident that Jesse was the *original* politician. Again, we can trace this to the fact that Leni Robredo, at 48, had yet to gain relevant experience in public office. The Robredos' conjugal-political relationship is quite analogous with the Aquinos during the 1980s. Much like Leni, former President Corazon "Cory" Aquino rose to political relevance after the assassination of her husband, former Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. Before becoming the first female president of the country, Cory Aquino was a housewife

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<sup>25</sup> While it can be argued that Robredo is not an outsider in Philippine politics, considering she is a human rights lawyer with an economics degree, it is indisputable that Robredo was a private person before Jesse's demise.

<sup>26</sup> Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is the 14th and second female president of the Philippines, with her father being Diosdado Macapagal Sr. who served as the 9th President of the Philippines from 1961-1965.

with no political background. The public perception around Cory's ascent to presidency featured great controversy, perhaps even more so than Robredo's.<sup>27</sup> During her presidential campaign, Marcos Sr. even used her womanhood as a means to demean her, calling Cory "merely a woman who has no clue in politics."<sup>28</sup> However, Cory the Widow became a prominent political figure forever embedded in Philippine history because it was Cory—a woman—who brought down the long-standing dictatorship of the Marcoses.<sup>29</sup> Still, Cory's presidency brought instability and political turbulence, with the majority of the criticism being that she was incapable of being president. While we can trace such speculation to Cory's lack of experience, her womanhood becomes a central talking point due to her spousal relationship with a deceased patriarch.

The similarities between Leni and Cory—fully embracing the notion of Beauvoir's Other—is a core aspect of why Robredo became a target of sexist political bullying by the opposing patriarchs. Such circumstances have led to her being trapped in the shadow of her spouse—believed to be a much more potent source of political value. If, however, Robredo was already in politics beforehand, then we can make a stronger argument about Robredo's independence as a female politician. What should be given great emphasis, however, is that the perception of Robredo's dependency on Jesse is just another byproduct of the Philippines' machismo culture. It is highly likely that even if Robredo established herself as a politician before Jesse, she would still be regarded as an other due to the Philippines' inclination towards male politicians. Despite this reality, there are examples of successful female politicians who are not bound by either their husbands' or fathers' political careers. They can serve as excellent case studies on how

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<sup>27</sup> We can trace this to the extreme circumstances that Cory was put in. Ninoy was the beacon of hope for re-establishing democracy and putting an end to Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship. After his assassination, the enraged Filipino public gathered well over a million signatures petitioning Cory to run for president and challenge Marcos Sr. via a snap election.

<sup>28</sup> "From Housewife to President: The Story of Cory Aquino," Martial Law Museum. <https://martiallawmuseum.ph/magaral/from-housewife-to-president-the-story-of-cory-aquino/>

<sup>29</sup> While Cory was a housewife, it should be noted that she hails from an extremely powerful political clan—the Cojuangcos.

women can overcome patriarchal oppression in a hyper-masculine political arena.<sup>30</sup>

The culmination of Robredo's political enigma analogous to Cory Aquino's political relevance is when she got catapulted as the Philippines' 14th Vice-President in 2016. The circumstances of Robredo's victory are controversial. Unlike her predecessors, Robredo never held a mayoral, senatorial, or executive position—all three of which are common springboards to gun for the two highest posts in the government. What made this even more baffling in the political sense was that she managed to defeat, by a small margin, then Senator Marcos Jr.<sup>31</sup> This circumstance somehow created the imminent rivalry between the two that would translate into a presidential rivalry in 2022. The surprise defeat of Marcos Jr., a renowned patriarch and the torchbearer of the still-popular despot Marcos Sr., led to electoral protests against Robredo. Eventually, such protests were all junked by the Supreme Court despite Duterte being the president at that time.<sup>32</sup>

Here, we can see the first manifestations of *Robredo as the Widow*, especially in the political limelight. Much like the allegations of incompetence thrown at Cory Aquino, there was a nationwide debate on whether Robredo won the elections. She is, after all, in the mind of the patriarchal Filipinos, a shadow of Jesse Robredo. How can she win the vice presidency, much more against the soaring political revival of Marcos Jr., who was on good terms with President Duterte? We can argue that Robredo still managed to secure the vice presidency because of the political backing of the Liberal Party, which at that point was still somehow powerful.<sup>33</sup> Robredo's allegiance to the Liberal Party will be

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<sup>30</sup> Some examples of this include former Senator Leila De Lima, Senator Risa Hontiveros, Senator Loren Legarda, and the late former Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago.

<sup>31</sup> Marcos Jr. was believed to be an almost *sure win* for the vice presidency because of several key assumptions, but it was primarily his consistency as the leading candidate in major survey rankings that promoted that belief.

<sup>32</sup> We bring into light Duterte amidst Leni's sweeping wins in the electoral protests because Duterte is a strong ally of the Marcoses.

<sup>33</sup> We say this because Mar Roxas secured the second highest number of votes behind Duterte for presidency, along with the fact that there were many LP allies still in the Congress and Senate, albeit this will later on change due to the nature of Duterteism.

the next primary factor we will explore, mainly how it affects her dynamic with Duterte.

### **Robredo as an Anti-Dutertismo Icon**

We discuss the second experience of Robredo, which is her term as vice president. Here, we analyze in-depth what may be the most impactful of the three images we argue for, Robredo, as an Anti-Dutertismo Icon. As mentioned earlier, Robredo contrasts with Duterte in their membership in political parties and their ideologies. Duterte is a brute with a Machiavellian personality who hinges on his bravado to justify his radicalness so long as it translates into supposed positive results.<sup>34</sup> Coupled with his notorious sexism, Robredo and Duterte are like water and oil. From a feminist perspective, how Robredo handled herself as vice president is probably praiseworthy. Unlike many other politicians who became turncoats in favor of Dutertismo, Robredo held her ground and stayed true to her beliefs. Not only was she unafraid to voice her beliefs nationwide, but she also acted on such pronouncements that garnered her much support.

Robredo's authenticity, coupled with her savviness in ensuring that her office is productive despite political bullying, is what would give her the moniker *Busy-Presidente*.<sup>35</sup> Here, we see the beginnings of the Pink Movement when Robredo was starting to make a name for herself not just as a widowed politician but as a woman who independently succeeded in her role despite the insurmountable challenges she faced. However, such circumstance is a double-edged sword when examined under Beauvoirian theory. Robredo had no independent image as a politician because she was a widow and had no prior public service background. Because of this, Robredo's political career got indeed publicized only when she became vice president.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carmel Abao, "Engaging Duterte: That Space in Between Populism and Pluralism" in *A Duterte Reader*. Edited by Nicole Curato. Manila: Bughaw, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> This moniker stems from the Spanish-adopted Filipino word, *Bise-Presidente* (lit: Vice-President) which shares a similar pronunciation with *Busy-Presidente*.

<sup>36</sup> We can argue that Robredo has political experience prior to being VP by serving as a district representative, but we should put this as irrelevant, as we already

Additionally, Robredo was allied to a patriarchal party herself, the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is a prominent name in Philippine politics dating back to 1946, after World War II—hence, it has been a staple in the country’s power dynamics.

Despite their progressive and liberal stance, the Liberal Party has been heavily associated with the democratic ideals of Ninoy Aquino and his opposition to Marcos Sr. during the Martial Law era up until his assassination in 1983. The rivalry between the two patriarchs cemented the contemporary public perception that the Liberal Party was the brainchild of Ninoy, ultimately giving rise to the 1987 Constitution that ushered in the country’s fifth republic. This dichotomy would later carry over to their sons Noynoy Aquino, Marcos Jr., and Duterte himself.<sup>37</sup> Robredo, who previously had no political relevance, is associated with a powerful organization dictated by men whom Duterte declared displeasure for due to their differing political ideologies.<sup>38</sup>

Herein lies the following problem: due to these circumstances, Robredo created a name for herself, at least initially, solely as an anti-Duterte figure—one tasked to bring Duterte down to revive the defeated Liberal Party. It is important to note that Robredo’s pronouncements were mostly against Duterte and not toward other politicians, which thereby creates rigid images of the two. If Duterte was pro-drug war, Robredo was against it.<sup>39</sup> If Duterte wanted longer

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established that the only relevant factor in our analysis is when she entered the political limelight.

<sup>37</sup> It is well-documented that Duterte honors the legacy of Marcos Sr. This is best seen when he gave the greenlight to transfer Marcos Sr.’s remains to the *Libingan ng Mga Bayani* (lit: Cemetery of the Heroes) within the first months of his presidency.

<sup>38</sup> Duterte’s displeasure—hatred even—is well-documented. It started from the presidential rivalry of Duterte and Roxas along with other clashes such as those against then Senator Leila De Lima. It should be also noted that Duterte’s slogan, Change is Coming, is directed at the political mishaps of the Aquino administration.

<sup>39</sup> One of the key campaign promises of Duterte was peace and order, and his grassroots approach to campaign promises significantly highlighted the local drug problem in the country. Duterte appealed to the emotions of low income-generating households who are directly affected by local crimes, campaigning for the empowerment of the police to allow them to protect children and families. Essentially, through an ironfisted approach that focused on arrest and imprisonment, he waged war against drug users and pushers.

police lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, Robredo sought medical interventions instead. The bickering between Robredo and Duterte was well-documented, with both traditional and social media reporting and monitoring their contrasting policies, projects, and pronouncements—especially during the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately for Robredo, Duterte remains one of the most popular and loved presidents in recent Philippine history.<sup>40</sup> Thus, making her yet again an Other where Duterte is the I. Recalling back to Beauvoir, we can see a manifestation of Robredo in the *modern woman* sense. An independent woman seeking emancipation from her patriarchal counterparts:

The ‘modern’ woman accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself to be their equal.<sup>41</sup>

Although it can be argued that gender is not a factor in this scenario because the two politicians have differing ideologies, we should remember that Duterte is a notorious patriarch who leans toward sexism. Hence, we argue that the constant clashes between Duterte and Robredo will always be seen as intrinsically motivated by gender.<sup>42</sup> For Beauvoir, the modern woman’s attitudes toward her emancipation from the patriarchy will lead to an *endless quarrel*. In such a situation, women actively defend themselves rather than achieve true liberation because society’s normative state leans heavily toward masculinity. In this case, Duterte’s macho, populist, and illiberal politics are the norm. Robredo is the outsider who tries to make herself relevant as vice president by contradicting the sexist standard that Duterte has

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<sup>40</sup> Azer Parrocha, “Duterte most popular post-Edsa 1 president: PUBLiCUS” Philippine News Agency, June 27, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1177599>

<sup>41</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674-675.

<sup>42</sup> A good indicator of this are the rampant materials that spread in online channels during the latter part of Duterte’s presidency, showcasing Duterte and Robredo as a *loveteam*—an idea where the two share romantic feelings for each other despite their constant bickering. This is a hallmark of romantic comedies in Hollywood, Korean drama, and Philippine television.

fostered. This and Robredo's lackluster background as an independent female politician ultimately created a predominant perception of her as a shallow anti-Duterte figure.

Instead of being viewed as an independent and rational leader, Robredo was perceived as a mere subordinate of the Liberal Party. This perception towards Robredo culminated in one of the most prevalent and sinister accusations thrown at her—that she is only a puppet of the Liberal Party.<sup>43</sup> This perception, fueled by propaganda, diverted the public's attention from Robredo's concrete accomplishments as vice president. While there is no definitive proof that this was thrown as a misogynist remark directed to her womanhood, we argue that Robredo being a woman significantly influenced her being called such. From when she became her late husband's torchbearer to her constant clashes with Marcos Jr. and Duterte, the patriarchy defined Robredo's experience under the political limelight. Hence, it is unsurprising that whatever political baggage Robredo carried, she would inevitably bring it to any movement or organization she would establish; in this case, it's the Pink Movement.

### **Vying for Presidency: The Pink Movement vs. Marcos Jr.**

In this third section, we will now focus on the Pink Movement itself and make sense of why it ultimately did not prevail to be the preferred political movement in the Philippines, thereby losing by a large margin against the traditional and conservative politics of Marcos Jr. As we established previously, the Pink Movement is an embodiment of the support people had for Robredo. Hence, the movement is equally Robredo's movement. Before we dive into the events that transpired amidst the campaign, we must look into what preceded it and how it was formed. As discussed earlier, we can conclude the movement to be a summation of all the frustrations born amidst Duterte's administration, along with the imminent threat of Marcos Jr. building up from it. The successful alliance of Marcos Jr. and Duterte's daughter,

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<sup>43</sup> The paper claims it is sinister because this culminated into Marcos Jr.'s supporters creating a series of libelous videos where Leni is portrayed and made fun of—quite literally—as a puppet.



now Vice-President Sara Duterte-Carpio, worsened these frustrations even more. While such frustrations towards the Dutertes and Marcoses exist, it is essential to note that these do not permeate to most Filipinos, as proven in electoral surveys along with Duterte's public trust ratings. Robredo, having been known as a Liberal Party leader, opted to establish her brand to remove the political baggage that the Liberal Party carried that was an easy target for criticism and propaganda.<sup>44</sup> And so, Robredo switched from the Liberal Party's iconic (but defamed) yellow—a color originally symbolizing Cory Aquino's democracy—to Pink, a color of *activism*.

### **Robredo as the Caring Mother**

Colors in Philippine politics are crucial, especially in elections. When Robredo switched to pink, she changed her message as a politician. After being labeled as a widow and accused of being a puppet by her opponents, we can say that Robredo now sought independence. After her widespread success stories during the COVID-19 pandemic that garnered worldwide attention, Robredo said that the color pink is hers and hers only—not Aquino's, not Roxas's, and not the Liberal Party patriarchs'. The fact that she chose pink also shows her statement. Pink is not a standard color in Philippine presidential elections, as the typical colors are typically blue, green, and red—sometimes, white and orange.<sup>45</sup> Pink, long associated with the color of femininity, was a symbolic manifestation of Beauvoir's modern woman. Facing two patriarchal dynasties, one woman backed by millions seeks emancipation from oppression. With the bullied Robredo at the helm, the Pink Movement embodied the unification of the oppressed—from

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<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most prominent accusations directed towards the Liberal Party (thus subsequently, to Robredo) are elitism and incompetence. These originally started when Duterte's campaign branded Roxas and Aquino as such during the 2016 elections.

<sup>45</sup> An exception to this is the vice-presidential candidacy of Bayani Fernando during the 2010 National Elections. Apart from the color, however, Fernando's branding is masculine and traditional. This is best seen in his campaign, as it emphasized his strong leadership as chair of the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

the women, the indigenous, the Muslims, and the poor.<sup>46</sup> However, the color pink, while supposedly representing emancipation, ultimately succumbed to the patriarchal values that run rampant in the country. The best manifestation is Robredo's new branding: her rebirth as an independent, powerful, and savvy political figure. We will highlight this branding as her third and last image: *Robredo as the Caring Mother*.

It is easy to see the evidence of the Caring Mother brand that Robredo embraced during her run for the presidency. In her declaration to run as president, Robredo emphasized feminist concepts to woo voters to side with the Pink Movement. Concepts such as love, care, and motherhood were her salient talking points, all contrasting with the popular macho bravado that made Duterte and Marcos Jr. famous. One of her most famous lines was "*ang nagmamahal, kailangan ipaglaban ang minamahal.*" (lit: Those who love must fight for what they love)—her declaration as a mother who loves her country. The prominent idea behind this is what Robredo calls as *radikal na pagmamahal* (lit: radical love), a greater form of love that seeks to unite.<sup>47</sup> At a glance, it is neither surprising nor controversial that Robredo adopted feminine branding focused on loving and nurturing. Besides identifying as a woman, Robredo is a single mother of three daughters. Robredo's brand is authentic. We can probably assume that is the intention of her political allies and volunteers to make that authenticity reach a larger audience and create a contrast against the traditional bravado of Marcos Jr. and Duterte. Unlike the Robredo from before, one who was relatively unknown and unaccomplished—Robredo, the political leader of the Pink Movement, was a different person. She has a myriad of accomplishments as vice president and was recognized locally and internationally. Adopting a feminine brand alongside the resurgence of her political career should not be problematic in theory.

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<sup>46</sup> The unification isn't only manifested among the lay, as Robredo also welcomed previous political foes to run under her slate—even those who were under Duterte. Basically, she welcomed all who were not in favor of Marcos Jr.'s presidency and were willing to share her progressive ideals and principles.

<sup>47</sup> Radical love is also a feminist concept first espoused by prominent feminist and American author, bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins). It is unclear whether Robredo's camp intentionally used hooks' concept. Hooks was neither mentioned nor credited as a source of inspiration or point of reference during the campaign.

From a Beauvoirian perspective, however, this leads to a *state of distrust*, particularly from patriarchal men. One of Beauvoir's arguments is that independent women (the modern woman, in this case) are susceptible to being mistreated due to the patriarchal norms imposed on them. In particular, Beauvoir asserts that the modern woman can be villainized in her pursuit of emancipation because she is seen as an "object subdued with subjectivity."<sup>48</sup> What Beauvoir means here is that as long as a patriarchal society has entrenched views of what femininity ought to be, women are subjected to a state of paradox that breeds confusion in balancing their womanhood and sexuality with their political emancipation.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the best example to illustrate this is a successful female celebrity. On the one hand, she can be viewed as independent and emancipated due to her success. On the other hand, society (codified by the patriarchy) will regard her success as unfair; a form of cheating as she relied on her feminine beauty and sexuality that men do not possess.

We can see this state of distrust in Robredo in a different sense. Robredo's was an appeal to emotion. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this distrust is the controversy about Robredo's capability to lead as a woman. While the Pink Movement may have enamored millions nationwide through Robredo's culture of care and volunteerism, questions arose about whether such praiseworthy feminine traits fit the presidency. This mindset somehow echoes Duterte's prominent misogynistic statement that the presidency "is not for women."<sup>50</sup> While Robredo wooed millions by claiming that her radical love can be the bedrock trait of a nation's president, her defeat

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<sup>48</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 675.

<sup>49</sup> Another concept that creates confusion and hostility about women's emancipation is the concept of benevolent sexism. Here, women are subjected to patriarchal norms that try to put them in a more positive light, albeit to the detriment of their freedom from gender stereotypes. A common example of benevolent sexism is the entrenched idea that women must always be protected by men because of their importance to society, particularly towards children. This belief may seem beneficial and positive for women's welfare at first, but it creates the stigma that women are intrinsically inferior to men.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Lema, "Philippines' Duterte says presidency no job for a woman," Reuters, January 14, 20 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte-idUSKBN29J21U>

may imply that in a hyper-masculine country like the Philippines, such feminine values are still looked at with distrust.<sup>51</sup>

This state of paradox, where a woman is caught in the dilemma of relying on her imposed femininity to achieve emancipation, is not unique to Robredo's experiences. In sociological terms, we can see this manifestation, empirically called the double bind. A double bind can be defined as two opposite qualities expected from an individual, or in this case, predominantly expected from women. This is most apparent in leadership roles like Robredo's, where women are subjected to four paradoxes or *balancing acts*.<sup>52</sup> Notably, these are identified as 1) being demanding yet caring, 2) being authoritative yet participative, 3) being self-advocating yet focused on serving others, and 4) being serious yet approachable. These four paradoxes are not experienced by men.<sup>53</sup> Take, for example, Duterte: he can be a complete brute with no regard for life, not pressured to balance it with the values of compassion. Marcos Jr., on the other hand, need not prove himself to be capable of serving others so long as he emphasizes his value as a political leader.<sup>54</sup>

It is also important to note that these paradoxical standards imposed on women significantly affect the effort they must put into their work. Unlike her male contemporaries, Robredo suffers from *multiple burdens*, another gender-based issue closely tied to the double-bind dilemma. Multiple burdens on women are brought forth by gender role stereotypes. Perhaps, the most common burden women face is balancing their careers with motherhood and community work. Unlike Duterte and Marcos, who can get away with mere public appearances to garner support, Robredo must sustain a good image as a mother to her children, a grateful wife to her late spouse, and a compassionate

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<sup>51</sup> Robredo's *radical love* was the primary value that she and the Pink Movement endorsed—in a state of immense political division due to the populism of Duterte and Marcos Jr., Robredo urged everyone to seek peace and love.

<sup>52</sup> Ronit Kark, Alyson Meister, and Wei Zheng "How Women Manage the Gendered Norms of Leadership," Harvard Business Review, November 28, 2018 <https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership> .

<sup>53</sup> Kark et al. simplifies these four balancing acts into the "nice-tough" paradox that are only expected from women.

<sup>54</sup> One of the leading criticisms directed against Marcos Jr. is that he has little-to-no tangible accomplishments as a public servant.

(but also reliable) leader to the people. It can be seen here that female politicians like Robredo are also at a disadvantage from a practical sense. The effort it takes to sustain various images of oneself has brought multiple burdens that create a large inequality gap that favors men.

These balancing acts, coupled with Robredo's personal and political background, make it uncharacteristic for the Pink Movement to lean more on the masculine spectrum; instead, they assert Robredo's "masculine" side by emphasizing her long list of political accomplishments and recognitions. While the *caring mother* strategy may seem practical, it is likewise problematic. If we are to examine this image using Beauvoir, the idea of a caring mother is, like being a wife, oppressive. Motherhood affirms submissiveness to the more powerful father figure. Being a mother is a social construct for Beauvoir. Yet, due to the circumstances brought forth by patriarchal conceptions of women, Robredo had no choice but to embrace it. It is a trap. If she adopts a more powerful and assertive persona, she will be branded inauthentic because of public perception that she embodies feminine traits—a caring mother, wife, and social worker. Unlike other female politicians like Duterte-Carpio or Defensor-Santiago, she doesn't utilize crass politics (like Duterte-Carpio) or use machismo in her speech (something Defensor-Santiago was popular for).<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, if she adopts a feminine persona which is more accurate in her representation as a woman, she will be branded weak and unfit for leadership. Ultimately, Robredo chose to be authentic to her femininity, banking on the potential that voters would trust her sincerity more than the bravado of Marcos Jr.

Here, we can see a clear link between all three images of Robredo that we have discussed. Robredo struggled in creating a convincing independent political career before her vice presidency and was deemed a questionable leader when the Pink Movement formed. Her being primarily known as an anti-Duterte icon raised questions

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<sup>55</sup> Both Duterte-Carpio and the late Defensor-Santiago have created political images of them as ironfisted, tough as nails women. Duterte-Carpio is famous for punching a court sheriff multiple times in front of a news camera when she was mayor in 2011. Defensor-Santiago was famous globally and received the moniker, *The Iron Lady of Asia*.

about her motivations. When it was time for her to appeal to the people to allow her to become the most powerful person in the country, the notion of Robredo as a Caring Mother was ultimately insufficient. Despite her vice-president accolades, the feminization she has been subjected to was already deep-rooted. Hence, with Robredo succumbing to such paradoxes and burdens, her Pink Movement followed suit. Post-2022 Presidential Elections, after her defeat at the hands of Marcos Jr., Robredo created a non-government organization called *Angat Buhay Foundation* to carry out the Pink Movement's spirit of care and volunteerism. Befitting the feminized beliefs thrown at her by the patriarchy, Angat Buhay need not be confined to the ideals of masculinity. Instead, it only focuses on the values of compassion and authenticity because it is voluntary. While it is up for debate on what kind of leader is the best fit to lead a nation, though it may not be the case, Robredo's defeat implies that feminine leadership values are still regarded as inferior.

### **The Future of Women in Philippine Politics**

Using Beauvoirian theory, female politicians can cushion themselves from the kind of feminization that Robredo experienced. Beauvoir wanted to dismantle the myth of the eternal feminine and sought a solution that focused on the phenomenology of the body.<sup>56</sup> Beauvoir wanted women to experience and engage in their respective lives without preconceived notions about their gender. Whereas modern women may try to act like men to be their equals, Beauvoir believed that women are intrinsically different from men. The path to be on equal footing without a state of quarrel is through recognition of each other as *an other for an other*—in the simplest terms, as reciprocal peers. However, Beauvoir knows this is no simple task—the patriarchy is, after all, the hegemon in society. Even if women were to achieve equality in the economic and political sense, there is still an existential problem that women must deal with due to the imposition of gender norms that subject them to inferiority. Making a recommendation on “what women should do” is complicated and pretentious. As such,

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<sup>56</sup> Begroffen and Burke, *Simone de Beauvoir*.

Beauvoir advocates a cultural revolution that would take gradual and subtle societal changes.

What is reasonable, however, is suggesting prerequisites that will enable a *change in perception* towards women in Philippine politics. Here, we argue something that may have slipped past the minds of Filipinos: all female presidents and promising presidents were marked with controversy. We have established similarities in controversy between Cory Aquino and Robredo earlier. Meanwhile, the second female president of the country, Macapagal-Arroyo, only succeeded the then-ousted president, Joseph “Erap” Estrada. In the next presidential elections, Macapagal-Arroyo was believed to have cheated against one of the most successful television patriarchs in the country’s history, Fernando Poe, Jr. Although women have been positively portrayed in Philippine politics, there remains a subtle trend of being controversial in pursuing the presidency. Becoming a president as a woman is still perceived as unusual. If we look at it from a *winning perspective*, the highest position a woman can attain in the Philippines is still just the vice presidency. Macapagal-Arroyo secured her first presidential term not through the elections but via the ouster and impeachment of Estrada. Against Poe Jr., she became notorious for allegedly spearheading an electoral scandal that secured her a second term.

In a time of extreme political instability, Cory Aquino’s presidency can be seen as a mere substitute for her late husband, who certainly would have been president had he not died. While Cory Aquino is regarded as the *Mother of Democracy* for restoring democracy to the Philippines, her being president will always be a controversial topic in Philippine political history. If we are to view it in this broader sense, there was never a time in history when Filipinos genuinely selected a woman as a leader under normal circumstances. While Robredo and Duterte-Carpio have secured back-to-back vice presidencies between 2016 and 2022, their pursuit of the presidency remains challenged, most especially due to the negative impacts of Dutertismo on women.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> When President Rodrigo Duterte made a public pronouncement that women are not fit for presidency, he stated this in the context of his daughter potentially running for the position. Duterte, who was asked about Sara’s potential presidential

From this Beauvoirian interpretation of Robredo's still-successful political career, I propose four prerequisites that are a gateway to loosening the stronghold of the patriarchy in the Philippines: first, they should ideally not be associated directly with political patriarchs (i.e., father-daughter, husband-wife, brother-sister relationships); second, that they hold an image that does not succumb to the pressures of macho politics, staying true to their intentions, values, and principles that have shaped them both as women and as politicians; third, that they value and advocate the spirit of feminism, enabling them to uplift the growing number of women in the government and represent women as a whole; fourth, that they have the political aptitude and motivation to transcend their male contemporaries—leaving a trailblazing legacy of feminist public service that can be a building block for the next female politician to build upon. At a glance, a shortage of female politicians has ticked all four.

Robredo and Cory Aquino were both heavily associated with patriarchs. Macapagal-Arroyo's tenure was rife with scandals and internalized political turmoil. Other notable female politicians, such as the late former Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago, former Senator Leila De Lima, and Senator Risa Hontiveros, maybe (and were, in Defensor-Santiago's case) closer to what Beauvoir envisions. Still, it is a society codified by men. It is a complex society where women are the ones who are against the odds. Although we argue that these four prerequisites are crucial in changing perception, it should be remembered that men are the ones in power—the ones who can give and take away. However, if everyone works together to change Filipinos' entrenched perception towards female politicians and women in general, we may see a future where there is no more state of paradox in their leadership—where women are chosen, without controversy, as the *I* to lead a country. Despite her beginnings and rough start as vice president, Robredo, and the Pink Movement nonetheless left a blazing legacy of feminist leadership and public service, earmarking what could be the start of actual change in Philippine politics.

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candidacy, said that he would rather have her stay away from the role because she is a woman.



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