The Verdict and the Bench

How Filipino opinion on the Vice-President's impeachment — and on the senators judging it — moved across seven weekly waves

A white-paper companion to the Pulso Intelligence weekly tracker, covering Wave 1 (fielded Aug 14) through Wave 7 (fielded Sep 25), 2026. It reads the two trend reports together — the national verdict and fairness trend, and the seven-wave movement in senator ratings — and sets each week's shift against the news that drove it.

Prepared by Hustle PH — Agile Data Solutions · Pulso Intelligence
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Executive summary

Across seven weekly waves, the public's instinct on the impeachment has been remarkably stable in shape but clear in direction: a plurality would acquit, and that plurality has grown. **By Wave 7 the gap between "not guilty" (49.0%) and "guilty" (33.4%) reached +15.6 points — the widest of the run.** Guilty sentiment fell to a seven-week low, having peaked at 36.3% back in Wave 2.

The sharper movement is on process. The share of Filipinos who consider the Senate's conduct of the trial **unfair has climbed every single wave, from 36.0% to 48.7%** — nearly one in two — while those calling it fair slid to a record-low 22.1%. The large "neutral / can't say" middle has drained from 39.0% to 27.8%, meaning opinion on the trial's fairness is not only hardening but hardening negative.

The ratings of the senator-judges tell a parallel story of erosion at the edges and a reshuffle at the top. **For six consecutive waves, Chiz Escudero held first place; in Wave 7 he slipped to fourth as Bong Go (2.96) and Robin Padilla (2.95) climbed past him**, immediately after the Senate court voted 13–1 on Sep 23 to lower the conviction threshold from 16 votes to 14. Escudero cast the lone dissent. Over the full run, Raffy Tulfo lost the most ground of any senator (−0.31), falling from near the top of the field to the middle.

These are not signs of an electorate tuning out: following of the trial held steady (28.5% weekly, 19.1% daily in Wave 7). The movement toward acquittal, and toward distrust of the process, is happening among people who are paying attention.

1. Background and method

The Pulso Intelligence weekly tracker measures public sentiment on the impeachment trial of Vice-President Sara Duterte, which opened in the Senate on July 6, 2026. Each wave is a fresh national sample, weighted to the COMELEC 2025 registered-voter profile (Sex × Age × Region), fielded over a seven-day window and reported against the previous wave. This paper consolidates seven waves fielded from Aug 14 to Sep 25, 2026.

Four measures anchor the tracker: a verdict question ("guilty or not guilty?"), a question on how closely respondents follow the trial, a question on whether the Senate is conducting it fairly, and a battery rating each senator-judge on fairness, performance and trust (1–5, where 5 is best; the three combine into an overall score). All four use consistent scales across every wave, so both levels and movements are directly comparable wave to wave. Sample sizes ranged from n = 1,500 (Wave 1) to n = 2,222 (Wave 3); Wave 7 is based on n = 1,760 (effective n = 1,469 after weighting).

2. The verdict: a widening path to acquittal

The headline number has barely strayed from a clear pattern: more Filipinos would acquit than convict, in every wave. What has changed is the size of that lead. The acquittal margin narrowed to its tightest in Wave 2 (+9.9), then widened for four straight waves to +15.6 in Wave 7. The driver this last week was a fall in guilty sentiment — down 2.1 points to 33.4%, the lowest reading of the tracker — rather than a surge in acquittal, which edged up only slightly to a run-high 49.0%.

Figure 1. The verdict over seven waves

Share who would vote guilty / not guilty / neutral if deciding today (%), Waves 1–7

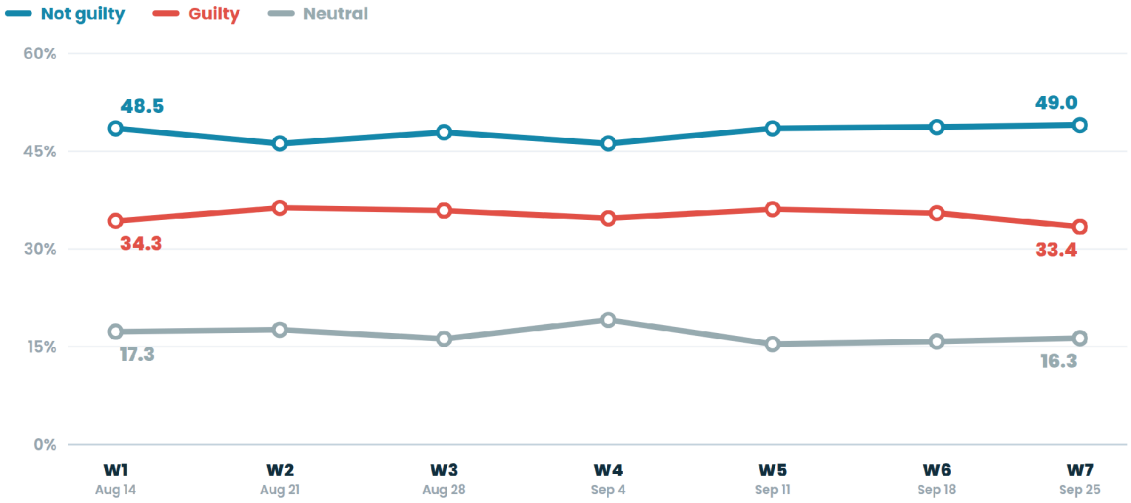


Figure 1. The verdict over seven waves (%). Source: Pulso Intelligence weekly tracker, W1–W7, 2026.

Reading the line against the calendar makes the movement legible. The table below pairs each wave's figures with the political event that best explains the week's shift.

Wave	Guilty	Not guilty	Lead	What moved it, week to week
W1 · Aug 14	34.3	48.5	+14.2	Baseline wave; trial open since July 6
W2 · Aug 21	36.3	46.2	+9.9	Guilt peaks; acquittal lead at its tightest
W3 · Aug 28	35.9	47.9	+12.0	Tulfo brothers grill the OVP over ₱122M in confidential funds
W4 · Sep 4	34.7	46.2	+11.5	Undecided middle widest (19.1%) as the fund story spreads
W5 · Sep 11	36.1	48.5	+12.4	Majority Leader Zubiri trims the trial calendar; threshold talk begins
W6 · Sep 18	35.5	48.7	+13.2	Ombudsman files PrimeWater graft complaints against the Villars
W7 · Sep 25	33.4	49.0	+15.6	Sep 23: Senate cuts the conviction bar 16→14; guilt to a run-low

The through-line is that specific, dated developments move the dial in interpretable ways. The confidential-funds coverage of late August coincided with the widest spell of indecision; the Sep 23 vote to make conviction easier coincided with the single clearest pro-acquittal shift of the run. Attention, meanwhile, never collapsed — weekly following sat near 28–29% throughout — so these are shifts of opinion, not of interest.

3. Faith in the trial is eroding

If the verdict trend is a story of stability with drift, the fairness trend is a story of steady deterioration. The share calling the Senate's conduct unfair has risen in every wave without exception, from 36.0% in Wave 1 to 48.7% in Wave 7 — a 12.7-point climb that has carried “unfair” across the old “neutral” middle and to the brink of an outright majority.

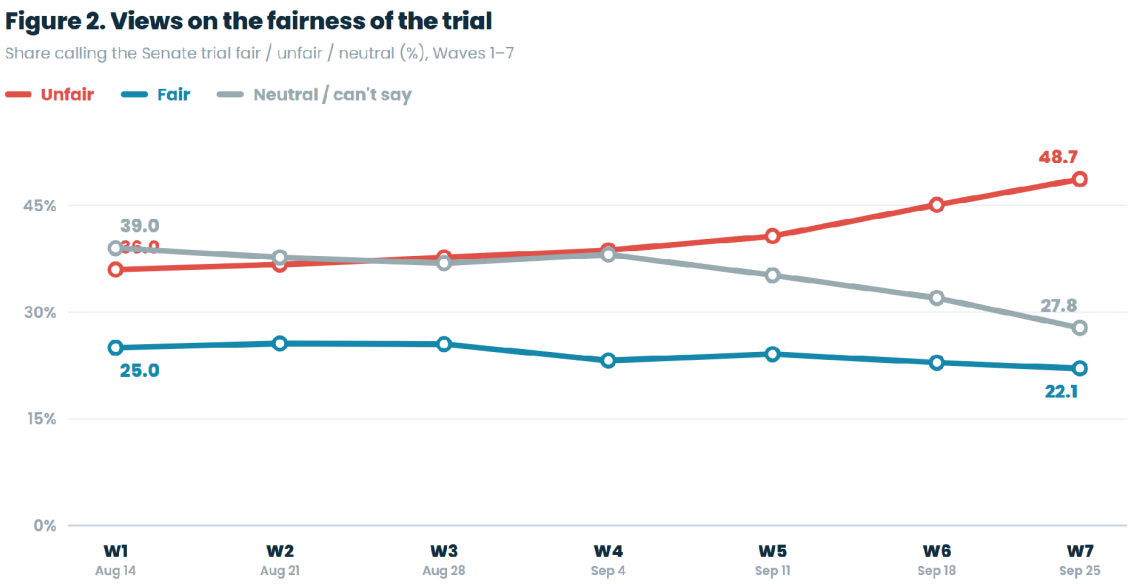


Figure 2. Views on the fairness of the trial (%). Source: Pulso Intelligence weekly tracker, W1–W7, 2026.

Two features deserve emphasis. First, the "fair" line is not merely losing to "unfair"; it is eroding on its own terms, reaching a record-low 22.1%. Second, the "neutral / can't say" share — 39.0% at the outset — has fallen to 27.8%, and almost all of that movement has flowed to "unfair." The public is forming a view on the Senate's handling of the case, and the view it is forming is skeptical. The fairness mean fell from 2.85 to 2.57 on the 1–5 scale over the run, its steepest leg between Waves 5 and 7 as the conviction-threshold fight dominated coverage.

4. The senator-judges: a new order at the top

Beneath a compressed field — most senators sit between 2.3 and 3.0 — the seven-wave trend reveals a genuine reordering. For six waves the top was settled, with Chiz Escudero in front as presiding officer. Wave 7 broke that: Escudero fell to fourth while two senators who declined to take the Sep 23 threshold vote, Bong Go and Robin Padilla, rose past him.

Figure 3. Senator overall scores, Waves 1–7

Mean of fairness, performance & trust (1–5). Four trajectories highlighted; the other 17 senators shown in grey

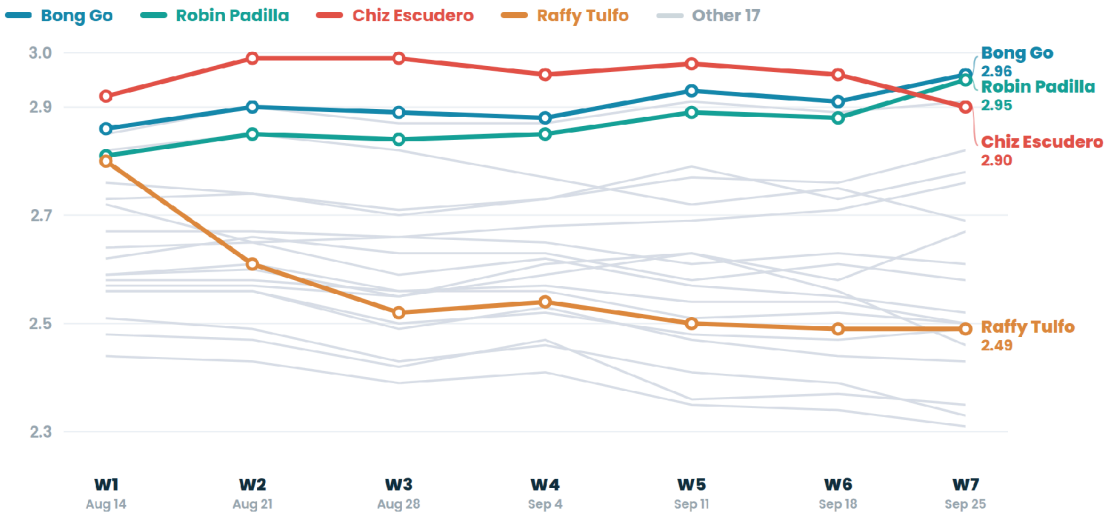


Figure 3. Senator overall scores, Waves 1–7 (1–5). Four trajectories highlighted; the other 17 senators in grey. Source: Pulso Intelligence.

The clearest single-senator story of the whole run belongs to Raffy Tulfo, whose standing fell further than anyone's — from 2.80 in Wave 1, near the top of the field, to 2.49, squarely mid-pack (−0.31 net). Much of that drop is concentrated early, around his late-August questioning of the OVP's confidential funds. At the other end, the biggest net gainers over seven weeks were Robin Padilla (+0.14), Bong Go (+0.10), Pia Cayetano (+0.09) and Camille Villar (+0.08).

Biggest movers over seven weeks (net change, W1 → W7)

Risers	Net	Fallers	Net
Robin Padilla	+0.14	Raffy Tulfo	−0.31
Bong Go	+0.10	JV Ejercito	−0.18
Pia Cayetano	+0.09	Bam Aquino	−0.13
Camille Villar	+0.08	Joel Villanueva	−0.13

5. A polarised bench: how the blocs are judged

The overall scores above are averages across all respondents, but they conceal a sharp partisan split. When senators are grouped by their Senate bloc and respondents by their own verdict, the ratings diverge dramatically — Filipinos reward the senator-judges who appear aligned with their own view of the case.

Among respondents who believe the Vice-President is guilty, the majority-bloc senators score highest (Bam Aquino 3.96, Risa Hontiveros 3.90, Kiko Pangilinan 3.88 in Wave 7), while the minority-bloc senators seen as her allies score far lower. Among respondents who believe she is not guilty, the ranking flips: Robin Padilla (3.88) and Bong Go (3.81) lead. In other words, the "neutral" overall number sits on top of two mirror-image electorates.

That structure is what makes Mark Villar's Wave 7 move so telling. **Among not-guilty respondents specifically — his presumed base — his overall score fell from 3.09 to 2.78, his steepest single-wave drop with that segment all year**, immediately after he broke from the minority to join the 13-vote majority on the threshold. Camille Villar and Robin Padilla, who held the minority line, were the two significant gainers the same week. The data captures a base reacting to a defection in real time.

Escudero's slip is visible in the same lens: among not-guilty respondents his score dropped from 2.98 to 2.80 in Wave 7, consistent with a presiding officer seen as having lost control of his own court on a 13–1 vote.

6. What it means

- **Acquittal is the base case in public opinion, and strengthening.** The not-guilty plurality has led in all seven waves and now by its widest margin. Any narrative of building momentum to convict is not supported by the sentiment data.
- **The legitimacy problem is bigger than the verdict problem.** Fairness perceptions are deteriorating faster and more consistently than verdict preferences. A near-majority now calls the trial unfair — a reputational risk for the Senate as an institution, independent of the case's outcome.
- **Process votes have public consequences.** The Sep 23 threshold decision maps almost one-to-one onto Wave 7's senator movements — those seen defending the higher bar or holding the minority line gained; those who enabled an easier conviction, or lost control of the proceeding, fell.
- **Senator ratings are read through a partisan lens.** Bloc-level scores show two mirror-image electorates. Communications or positioning that plays well with one camp will, by construction, cost ground with the other.

Suggested media angles

- "Widest yet": acquittal sentiment hits a seven-week high as the conviction bar is lowered.
- "Nearly one in two": Filipinos calling the Senate trial unfair approaches a majority for the first time.
- "New No. 1": Bong Go overtakes Escudero atop the senator-judge ratings after the 13–1 threshold vote.
- "The cost of switching": Mark Villar's own base marks him down sharply after he breaks to the majority.

7. Methodology and notes

Each wave is an independent national sample of registered voters, fielded over a seven-day window via the Hustle PH survey platform and weighted to the COMELEC 2025 profile on Sex × Age × Region. The verdict and fairness items use five-point scales collapsed into top-two / middle / bottom-two groupings; means are reported on the raw 1–5 scale. Senator overall scores are the mean of the fairness, performance and trust items (1–5). All seven waves use identical scales, so comparisons of both level and change are valid across the full run.

Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Event attributions in Section 2 are the analysts' best-matched context for each wave's movement and are interpretive, not causal claims; some weekly shifts have no single dated trigger. Sample sizes by wave: W1 1,500; W2 1,684; W3 2,222; W4 2,098; W5 1,743; W6 2,031; W7 1,760.

Prepared by Hustle PH — Agile Data Solutions for Pulso Intelligence. Non-partisan; produced for media and research use. Contact: jason.gaguan@hustle-ph.com.

Appendix A. Verdict, fairness and attention by wave (%)

Measure	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7
Guilty	34.3	36.3	35.9	34.7	36.1	35.5	33.4
Not guilty	48.5	46.2	47.9	46.2	48.5	48.7	49.0
Neutral (verdict)	17.3	17.6	16.2	19.1	15.4	15.8	16.3
Acquittal lead	+14.2	+9.9	+12.0	+11.5	+12.4	+13.2	+15.6
Verdict mean (1–5)	2.73	2.79	2.75	2.76	2.74	2.74	2.68
Fair	25.0	25.6	25.5	23.2	24.1	22.9	22.1
Unfair	36.0	36.7	37.7	38.7	40.7	45.1	48.7
Neutral (fairness)	39.0	37.7	36.9	38.1	35.2	32.0	27.8
Fairness mean (1–5)	2.85	2.85	2.82	2.77	2.76	2.67	2.57
Follow daily	20.4	19.8	18.4	18.1	20.7	19.7	19.1
Follow weekly	27.2	29.3	29.2	27.0	28.7	29.1	28.5

Appendix B. Senator overall scores by wave (1–5)

Ranked by Wave 7 overall score. Net = Wave 7 minus Wave 1.

Senator	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	Net
Bong Go	2.86	2.90	2.89	2.88	2.93	2.91	2.96	+0.10
Robin Padilla	2.81	2.85	2.84	2.85	2.89	2.88	2.95	+0.14
Alan Cayetano	2.85	2.90	2.87	2.87	2.91	2.89	2.91	+0.06
Chiz Escudero	2.92	2.99	2.99	2.96	2.98	2.96	2.90	−0.02
Pia Cayetano	2.73	2.74	2.71	2.73	2.77	2.76	2.82	+0.09
Loren Legarda	2.76	2.74	2.70	2.73	2.79	2.73	2.78	+0.02
Imee Marcos	2.72	2.65	2.66	2.68	2.69	2.71	2.76	+0.04
Bam Aquino	2.82	2.85	2.82	2.77	2.72	2.75	2.69	−0.13
Camille Villar	2.59	2.60	2.55	2.61	2.63	2.58	2.67	+0.08
Kiko Pangilinan	2.67	2.67	2.66	2.65	2.61	2.63	2.61	−0.06
Risa Hontiveros	2.62	2.66	2.63	2.63	2.58	2.61	2.58	−0.04
Win Gatchalian	2.64	2.65	2.59	2.62	2.57	2.55	2.52	−0.12
Ping Lacson	2.59	2.61	2.56	2.56	2.51	2.52	2.50	−0.09
Lito Lapid	2.58	2.58	2.56	2.57	2.54	2.54	2.50	−0.08
Tito Sotto	2.56	2.56	2.50	2.52	2.48	2.47	2.49	−0.07
Raffy Tulfo	2.80	2.61	2.52	2.54	2.50	2.49	2.49	−0.31
Mark Villar	2.57	2.57	2.55	2.59	2.63	2.56	2.46	−0.11
Erwin Tulfo	2.56	2.56	2.49	2.53	2.47	2.44	2.43	−0.13
Migz Zubiri	2.48	2.47	2.42	2.47	2.36	2.37	2.35	−0.13
JV Ejercito	2.51	2.49	2.43	2.46	2.41	2.39	2.33	−0.18
Joel Villanueva	2.44	2.43	2.39	2.41	2.35	2.34	2.31	−0.13

Source: Pulso Intelligence weekly impeachment tracker, Waves 1–7 (fielded Aug 14 – Sep 25, 2026). Weighted to COMELEC 2025 (Sex × Age × Region).