



The Philippines Begins the Race to Succeed Duterte

President Rodrigo Duterte's single term will soon end, but he doesn't plan to go quietly.

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The Philippines is preparing for the departure of President Rodrigo Duterte as the filing period officially opens for the May 2022 presidential election on Friday. How far the country will ultimately veer from his leadership once his single term ends is an open question.

The decision is complicated by the fact that despite his term limit, Duterte isn't planning to leave the political stage. His PDP-Laban party has already nominated him to run as vice president, a position he says he wants in order to finish his war on drugs but which critics say is more about shielding himself from prosecution or even as a backdoor to the presidency.

If trends from recent opinion polls hold, Duterte won't need to run at all to stay close to the presidential palace. His daughter, Sara Duterte-Carpio, is the current front-runner. Although she has recently said she would rather run for reelection as mayor of Davao, where she is hugely popular, that hasn't stopped speculation over her candidacy. Her spokesperson said on Friday that she "continues to listen to the pulse of the Filipino people" after a new poll showed her as the top choice for president.

Her father made similar comments before his come-from-behind victory in 2016, both a sign that she may be following in his footsteps and a caution against picking a winner early. “Anything can change at least until a month before the vote,” Georgi Engelbrecht, a Philippines expert at the International Crisis Group, told *Foreign Policy*. “And even then, just the way Philippine politics operates, I wouldn’t be surprised if there could be more last-minute turns.”

Manny Pacquiao, the former world champion boxer-turned-senator, is hoping to disrupt the family affair after he was nominated by a PDP-Laban faction, but he’s not the only big name running. Isko Moreno, a former movie star-turned-mayor of Manila, is also expected to file his candidacy on Monday.

Leni Robredo, the sitting vice president, was nominated by the opposition 1Sambayan coalition on Thursday but has yet to commit to running. Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., the son of dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., is also expected to run and came second to Duterte-Carpio in a Thursday poll.

Duterte-Carpio is hoping to ride a popular wave begun by her father, who, despite international condemnation of his war on drugs, has remained popular with the public. His approval rating has been helped by steady economic growth during his tenure, and although buffeted by the coronavirus pandemic, the Philippines is one of only two Southeast Asian economies to escape a downgrade when the Asian Development Bank issued its growth forecast on Wednesday.

The drug war. Whatever avenue he chooses to embrace, Duterte has good reason to want to stay close to power. In September, the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into Duterte’s war on drugs, which human rights groups estimate has killed as many as 30,000 people. Duterte’s government has said it will not cooperate with any international inquiry, but the next government may not feel the same way.

China pressure. Whoever wins, he or she will have to find a way to balance the relationship with two global powers with which it has complex histories: China, its biggest trading partner (and South China Sea rival), and the United States, its former colonizer and close military ally.

On Thursday, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said he had been urged by a former Chinese ambassador not to strengthen the terms of a U.S.-Philippine mutual defense treaty, established in 1951, as such a move would be deemed provocative by Beijing. Lorenzana has pushed for the treaty to also cover “gray zone” threats, including the hundreds of boats that make up China’s maritime militia.

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, in April questioned whether it’s a defense relationship the Biden administration should spend much time on improving. “Before reviving

alliance relationships, the administration should ensure that the ties are worth reviving,” Bandow wrote. “That with the Philippines is not.”

What We’re Following Today

Germany’s kingmakers meet. The leaders of the two parties holding the balance of power in a future German government meet for further talks to align their positions ahead of upcoming coalition negotiations with larger parties. With the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats holding roughly the same amount of seats in parliament but unlikely to enter into coalition together again, the Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) have a chance to exert a power beyond their smaller seat totals.

The FDP and Greens will hold separate talks with the Social Democrats on Sunday, while the Christian Democrats meet the FDP on Sunday and the Greens on Tuesday.

Venezuela’s new cash. Venezuela launches a new digital currency today in a monetary overhaul that includes slashing zeroes from its hyperinflated bolivar. It’s the third time in 13 years that the country has had to reset its currency in such a way. The changes come as the bolivar has dropped in value by 73 percent in value 2021 alone, speeding a shift toward conducting transactions in U.S. dollars.

Keep an Eye On

Georgia votes. Georgia holds local elections this weekend with national significance, as the ruling Georgian Dream party has said it will call fresh parliamentary elections if the party fails to garner 43 percent of votes. The elections could also mark a comeback of former President Mikheil Saakashvili, who has said he would return to “protect” voters’ “electoral choice.” Saakashvili’s homecoming has prompted a showdown with Georgia’s government: Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said on Tuesday that if the former president “sets foot on Georgian soil, he will be immediately arrested and imprisoned.”

U.S.-Ethiopia ties. The United States has threatened Ethiopia with sanctions after seven senior U.N. officials were expelled from the country on Thursday for alleged “meddling” in Ethiopia’s internal affairs amid a government aid blockade of the Tigray region. Those asked to leave include the country heads of UNICEF and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“We must see meaningful steps within weeks to initiate discussions to achieve a negotiated cease-fire, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and ensure respect for human rights. Absent significant progress, we’ll take action—and we have the methods to do that,” White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

Odds and Ends

A Turkish man declared missing has been found after he accidentally volunteered for his own search party. Beyhan Mutlu had wandered into a forest in Turkey's western Bursa province after drinking with friends, and authorities began the search there after he never returned home. According to the Turkish broadcaster NTV, Mutlu stumbled on the search party and decided to join it, only to realize hours later it was for him when the team started shouting his name. He was soon driven home by police.