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Who will succeed the Philippines's Duterte?

The son of former dictator Marcos and the daugther of current president Duterte joined forces for the elections. What are the prospects for the country?

Will father be followed by son and father by daughter? On 9 May, when the Philippine presidential elections will take place, the duo of Ferdinand 'Bong Bong' Marcos Jr and Sara Duterte-Carpio want to follow in their fathers' footsteps and consolidate their families' grip on power. Marcos Jr intends to inherit the legacy of his father Ferdinand Marcos, the long-term dictator who ruled the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. Duterte-Carpio, on the other hand, is the daughter of incumbent President Rodrigo Duterte and could consolidate the fledgling family dynasty as vice president under Marcos Jr.

If the Marcos-Duterte pair is elected on Monday, there is unlikely to be a break with the policies of the current president. It was a surprise when Rodrigo Duterte was elected president of the Philippines in 2016 with 39 per cent of the vote. Starting the presidential campaign as an outsider, the then mayor of Davao City, the country's second largest city, managed to pull off an upset victory. Duterte had promised to fight corruption and crime, to make the island state drug-free within six months, and to decentralise the country. He presented himself as a strong leader – which parts of the Filipino population were longing for.

Duterte's legacy

Subsequently, because of his proclaimed 'war on drugs', Duterte came under criticism from human rights organisations and the international community. In the course of the campaign, more than 6,000 drug dealers and addicts were killed by police and vigilante squads, according to official figures. Estimates by human rights organisations of so-called 'extrajudicial killings' are much higher, at around 30,000 victims. Critics of the campaign, such as the senator and former chair of the Commission on Human Rights, Leila de Lima, have been rigorously targeted: De Lima was arrested in 2017 and remains imprisoned to this day. Because of the

serious human rights violations, the International Criminal Court in The Hague has opened investigations against Duterte.

Marcos Jr wants to inherit Duterte's legacy.

His term in office also saw the declaration of martial law on the island of Mindanao, when Islamist terrorist groups succeeded in taking control of the city of Marawi. More than 1,000 people died when Philippine forces retook the city, and half a million inhabitants were displaced. In the field of foreign policy, Duterte moved closer to China during his presidency, snubbing the US as its former protective colonial power. He also ensured that the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos was buried posthumously in the cemetery of heroes.

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Duterte imposed one of the strictest and longest lockdowns in the world. Until recently, Duterte had extremely high approval ratings among the population.

The dictator's son

Now, Marcos Jr wants to inherit Duterte's legacy. Because of a peculiarity of the Philippine electoral system, he has already run against his opponent, Leni Robredo, once. The president and vice-president are elected independently for six years. This makes it possible for candidates from different camps to occupy the posts. After the term of office has expired, a re-election for the same office is not possible.

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Marcos Jr already competed against Leni Robredo for the office of vice-president in 2016. The new edition of the contest, however, is taking place under different auspices: Robredo managed to narrowly beat her rival. He went to different courts to overturn the election result but lost in all instances. In the 2022 presidential election, their head-to-head is now going into the second round. Until recently, Marcos Jr was clearly ahead of the current vice-president in polls (56 to 24 per cent). The other eight candidates are far behind with less than ten per cent of the vote. Marcos Jr's lead may also be due to the popularity of his running mate, vice-president Sara Duterte-Carpio, who already succeeded her father in office as mayor of Davao

City.

Remarkably, both of them – unlike all the other candidates – did not participate in televised debates during the election campaign. And Marcos Jr refused a direct TV duel with Robredo. Political commentators attribute the underlying motivation of Marcos' candidacy to an attempt to clear the family name. Imelda Marcos, the widow of the former dictator, is suspected to be the driving force in the background.

Similar motives can be assumed for Duterte-Carpio. Should she succeed in being elected vice-president, she would establish a new political dynasty in the country. Also, the 43-year-old would be in an ideal position to run for president in 2028.

Leni Robredo: the opposition candidate

Leni Robredo, on the other hand, embodies the last hope of the opposition. As Vice-President, she has been the counterweight to President Duterte for the last six years. Robredo is running as an independent candidate but has been the face of the Liberal Party in the Philippines for many years. Before her political career, she was a human rights lawyer. Despite the clear gap to Marcos Jr in the polls, some hope for an upset victory for Robredo in recent weeks, as Robredo made small gains in the polls, while Marcos lost slightly. This may be related to the massive mobilisation of Robredo's campaign supporters, who made pilgrimages to her campaign rallies in thousands. Moreover, Robredo is ahead of 'Bong Bong' Marcos in the evaluations of the Google Trends figures. So, the suspense remains to the very end.

With the Marcos Jr/Duterte pair favoured to win the election, the Philippines probably faces a continuation of current policies.

In addition to the presidency and vice-presidency, seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives will also be decided. Political parties, however, play a subordinate role in the election. Only 63 of the 304 seats in the House of Representatives are filled through party lists. The elections are highly personalised, which is why public recognisability is a key criterion for candidacy. While political manifestos hardly play a role. Candidates for political office often either come from one of the established family dynasties or have gained notoriety elsewhere, for example as actors, athletes, models, or TV presenters.

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Philippines probably faces a continuation of current policies. It remains to be seen what that means for the country.



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