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Monday 1 November 2021, by [CASTANEDA Jason](#) (Date first published: 22 October 2021).

Nation plumbs the depths of global Covid rankings in the latest indictment of President Duterte's poor pandemic response

MANILA - Despite a series of lockdowns and some of the most stringent social distancing measures worldwide, the Philippines is still consistently ranked among the global laggards in Covid-19 management.

According to [Bloomberg's Covid Resilience Ranking](#), the Southeast Asian country is the "worst place" in the world to be during the pandemic, owing to President Rodrigo Duterte's administration's widely panned mismanagement of the double public health and economic crisis.

The Philippines has also ended up at the bottom of the recently released [Nikkei Asia Recovery Index](#) global rankings, placing 121st out of 121 countries worldwide. Signs of recovery are, at best, fragile, while there are constant fears of a new Covid surge.

The Philippine economy suffered five consecutive quarters of gross domestic product (GDP) contraction since last year. The World Bank has slashed the country's growth forecast for this year to only 4.3% following an almost 10% contraction last year.

The country was initially expected to [post a 6-7% growth rate](#) in 2021, supposedly placing it on a glide path to full recovery by mid-2022.

Due to the deep "scarring effects" from the pandemic, the Philippines might take up to three years before fully recovering from recent impoverishment, [according to](#) the Japanese banking giant, Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

Despite his widely perceived as abysmal performance, President Duterte, however, seems determined to stay in power by all means necessary. He is reportedly [still exploring a potential joint ticket](#) with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr, who is currently leading in polls, at next year's presidential election.

Overseeing massive state resources for pandemic relief and amassing a huge reservoir of Covid-19 vaccines which are yet to be distributed in vote-rich yet resource-poor regions, Duterte seems confident that he can win a backdoor second term despite a constitutional single-term limit.

If so, it will come against the backdrop of abysmal Covid-19 management. From [a high of 21,000 daily confirmed](#) cases in mid-September, the Philippines has managed to reduce its caseload to just over 5,000 in recent days.

But weak contact-tracing, bureaucratic underreporting and high positivity rates conceal the extent

of the country's infection rate, experts and analysts say.

In Metro-Manila, the country's political capital and economic hub, [83 neighborhoods](#) are still under granular lockdowns despite a shift to more relaxed restrictions to aid economic recovery.

Under the current Alert Level 3 lockdown, some establishments are allowed to operate at up to 30% indoor capacity, albeit only for fully vaccinated individuals, and up to 50% capacity for outdoor activities, provided all employees are fully vaccinated.

"We still need to ensure the safety of our people because complacency might cause another surge in Covid-19 cases," said Philippine National Police chief General Guillermo Eleazar.

But vaccination rollout, which accelerated in the second quarter of this year, [remains highly uneven](#), with the bulk of fully vaccinated citizens in the national capital region.

Much of the country's rural and impoverished areas may not reach mass immunity until well into next year, further hampering a return to a semblance of normality.

In the latest [Bloomberg's Covid Resilience Ranking](#), which measures government response and management of the pandemic, the Philippines garnered a pitiful score of 40.2, placing last among 53 nations.

"Southeast Asian economies continue to populate the ranking's bottom rungs in September, with Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines the last five. While the region's outbreak may have peaked, their export-reliant economies are still struggling from the hit," the Bloomberg ranking report warned.

The Philippines similarly ranked poorly in the Nikkei Asia's recovery index, which covered twice as many countries in terms of their containment of Covid-19 infection rates, vaccine rollout, and overall social mobility and economic resilience. In its latest report released in early October, the Philippines garnered only a score of 30.6, placing it at the bottom of a list of 121 nations.

Poor government management is hurting economic recovery, too.

"If you compare virus management between [the] Philippines and Singapore, it's quite significantly different, and this is reflected with just how far you can see real GDP has to go in the Philippines, before it returns to pre-pandemic levels," Moody's Analytics senior economist [Katrina Ell](#) said earlier this month, underscoring the government's "lackluster fiscal support."

"So, a move back to aggressive movement restrictions is likely if they do see infection rate spikes again and then that means as well that the economic recovery, although they're particularly fragile right now, they will potentially lose significant momentum as those aggressive movement controls are reinstated to relieve tension on the health care system from low vaccination rates," she added.

All other major research and think tanks have made similar observations on the Philippines' prospects.

"GDP remains well below its pre-crisis level, and the recovery is likely to be held back by scarring from the pandemic. Business insolvencies, weaker household balance sheets, a collapse in investment and labor market scarring mean GDP is unlikely to recover to its pre-crisis trend," a recent Capital Economics report said.

"We expect GDP to still be more than 10% smaller than its pre-crisis trend by the end of 2023 - by

far the largest gap in the region,” the same report added.

UK-based Oxford Economics similarly warned that the country’s current economic performance is 9% below pre-pandemic levels, the worst in the entire region.

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