

Presidential Election likely to be held after the middle of August, say observers

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The protagonists are gradually emerging, but observers expect the Presidential Election showdown to still be months away, possibly sometime in the last two weeks of August.

The election must be held by Aug 31 and observers noted that certain periods between now and then can safely be ruled out, leaving only a couple of windows of opportunity.

Technically, the election can be held not more than three months before the current term of the incumbent expires on Sept 1.

Constitutional expert Thio Li-ann noted that the period between National Day on Aug 9 and the National Day Rally — usually held one to two weeks later — is unlikely to be chosen because the focus would be on the Rally, traditionally a high point in the political calendar.

To hold the Presidential Election right before National Day would also stretch resources needed for the parade, the National University of Singapore law lecturer pointed out.

While noting that the election could possibly be held next month, Professor Thio added: “Singaporeans have never had two elections in a year before, and the recent General Election had been extraordinary.”

This is why she thinks the Government would likely have a few months’ buffer, for people to “cool down before having yet another election”.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noted that, going by historical precedence, Nomination Day for the past three Presidential Elections had been in mid-August. Also, Polling Day for the only contested election to date, in 1993, was held 10 days after Nomination Day, she said.

“But of course, it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to call the date,” Dr Koh added.

Ultimately, the date of the election might depend on when the Government wants Parliament to be convened, said NUS adjunct law professor Kevin Tan.

Dr Tan, who specialises in constitutional law, among others, said: “The only reason why they would want to call the election earlier would be if they want to summon Parliament earlier, and for it to be presided over by a new President.”

During the last General Election in 2006, which was also held in May, Parliament was reconvened in November.

Prof Thio noted that sufficient time has to be allowed for campaigning, televised speeches, if any, and for candidates to submit their papers.

According to the Elections Department, the date of nomination will follow between five days and one month after the Writ of Election is issued by the Prime Minister.

The date of the polls will come not earlier than the 10th day, and not later than the 56th day, after the notice of contested elections is issued.

Candidates can start campaigning after this notice is published, and permitted platforms include house visits, pamphlet distribution, posters and banners, Internet advertising and rallies. However, as with the recent General Election, there will be a Cooling Off Day — a first for the Presidential Election.