



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS RELEASE

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NAMFREL releases preliminary observations on the 2021 Mock Elections

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released its preliminary observations on the conduct of the 2021 mock elections, as observed by its volunteers who are currently onsite in different voting centers across the country. NAMFREL has more than a hundred volunteers observing in 25 voting centers nationwide for today's mock elections. The preliminary observations cover the opening procedures as well as the first few hours of voting, including arrangements inside the voting centers.

The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) has been transparent so far in the conduct of the activity, with election monitoring organizations, political parties, civic organizations, and the media being allowed to observe the processes closely, which opens avenues for recommendations from election stakeholders.

NAMFREL observers reported that in general, the conduct of the mock elections has been smooth and peaceful so far, with polling precincts opening on time, and with no significant delay in the start of voting in most voting centers observed. Observers also note that the activity appears well-organized in general, and anti-Covid protocols are generally being enforced and followed.

Opening

During the opening process prior to voting, NAMFREL observers reported some delay in the initialization process for the vote counting machines (VCMs). In a voting center in Digos, Davao del Sur, NAMFREL observers reported that it took about an hour for the initialization process, which delayed the start of voting by about an hour. In a voting center in Pateros, the VCM rejected ballots several times.

Voting

NAMFREL observers reported that the voting process has been smooth, with voters taking between 5 to 10 minutes to vote, and up to 30 minutes for senior citizens. Most polling places observed allowed up to 10 voters inside at any given time.

NAMFREL observers do note that the enforcement of certain health protocols has not been consistent, namely physical distancing, proper wearing of masks, disinfection of hands, and disinfection of election materials like pens and chairs after every use.

In a polling place in Zamboanguita, Negros Oriental, NAMFREL volunteers observed that several ballots were rejected by the VCM, and the members of the Electoral Board (EB) had to cut the sides of the ballot due to paper jam.

Observers also note some rooms for improvement after a voter fills out the ballot. In a polling place in Taguig, crowding has been observed around the VCM while voters insert their ballots. In the same polling place, lack of vote secrecy was also observed in the vote casting process as the ballots were not covered while being inserted into the VCM, allowing the people around to see the votes. In a polling place in Pasay, where the VCM was not located in the same room where voting was taking place, a NAMFREL observer was concerned that this could facilitate vote buying as a voter could easily take a photo of their ballot.

Voting centers

Inside the different voting centers being observed, NAMFREL volunteers note that temperatures are being checked at the entrance; children are not being allowed to enter; there is an express lane for seniors, PWDs, and the heavily pregnant; medical personnel are present onsite; and there is good mobile phone signal in most of the voting centers observed.

Observers also note the presence of Voter Assistance Desks (VADs) that are mostly manned by members of election monitoring organizations, but in some, were manned by Comelec staff, barangay officials and police officers. Emergency Accessible Polling Places (EAPPs) and Isolation Polling Places (IPPs) are present, but NAMFREL volunteers did not observe the IPPs being used, even for simulation purposes, except in a voting center in Albay.

Volunteers also suggest the placement of more arrows and signages inside the voting centers, and in a language that voters in the locality would understand.

NAMFREL will continue observing the mock election process throughout the day, and will release another update soon covering counting, transmission of results, and canvassing. NAMFREL will send COMELEC a more comprehensive report with recommendations after it has gathered all observations from the field.

NAMFREL has filed before the COMELEC in October 2021 a Petition for Accreditation as COMELEC citizens' arm for the 2022 National and Local Elections. Among its proposed activities are Automated Elections System (AES) Monitoring, Open Election Data (OED), Random Manual Audit (RMA), and a possible parallel vote tabulation (PVT). NAMFREL hopes that its participation and contribution to COMELEC's efforts would help improve voter confidence, and eventually increase the number of Filipinos who would turn out to vote in the 2022 NLE. ###