



## **NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)**

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### **HONORABLE SHERIFF M. ABAS**

Chairman  
Commission on Elections  
Palacio del Gobernador, Intramuros, Manila

**Attention:** Director Teopisto E. Elnas, Jr, Office of the Deputy Executive Director for Operations (DEDO)

Dear **Chairman Abas,**

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) would like to congratulate the COMELEC for the holding of the Voting Simulation Exercise last Saturday, October 23, 2021, in San Juan City, and to thank the Commission for inviting NAMFREL to follow the process, and for giving us an opportunity to make recommendations to improve future simulation exercises and to prepare for the 2022 elections.

Please find below some of our observations during the voting simulation, as well as recommendations both for the 2022 elections and for forthcoming simulations.

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>1. COVID PROOFING</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperature was checked at the entrance to the voting center.</li> <li>• Health declaration forms were not required.</li> <li>• Rubbing alcohol was provided.</li> </ul>	NAMFREL would like to still recommend the use of contact tracing forms or contact-tracing apps using QR codes.
Isolation Polling Precinct (IPP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poll workers in the IPP used face masks and face shields only.</li> <li>• As no voters were observed to use the IPP because no participant exceeded the maximum allowable body temperature, IPP activities were not simulated.</li> </ul>	Role Playing. In future simulation exercises, NAMFREL would like to suggest assigning some individuals to play the role of voters who were determined to exhibit symptoms, to go through the process inside the IPPs.
Presence of physical barriers between the voters and poll workers.	
Physical distancing – There was a tendency to forget to observe physical distancing.	NAMFREL recommends that COMELEC issue reminders not only through signages, but also by assigning poll workers to do this task while going around the voting center.
<b>2. SITE</b>	
Site: San Juan Elementary School New building was used Rooms not marked  The rooms were spacious and well-ventilated.	NAMFREL recommends utilizing similar rooms with ample space and proper ventilation on election day.
<b>3. STAGES OF THE PROCESS</b>	
3.1 At the entrance: temperature checking –	At the next simulation, NAMFREL suggests that COMELEC assign some individuals to play the

<p>No participant exhibited visible symptoms, so that part of the entry process was not simulated.</p>	<p>role of voters who were determined to exhibit symptoms, to be able to simulate the process inside the IPPs.</p>
<p>3.2 At the voter verification desks –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were four clustered precincts.</li> <li>• ID (any form) was presented to the election worker.</li> <li>• Poll workers issued to each voter in a sheet of post-it the number of established precinct and clustered precinct assignment.</li> </ul>	<p>NAMFREL suggests to include in the information given to voters their sequence number on the list, and the room/building where the assigned clustered precinct may be found, to prevent voters from wandering around or getting lost inside the voting center. This would be especially important if voters would be using rooms that are different from previous elections.</p> <p>To minimize face-to-face interaction during verification, the COMELEC could also explore alternative ways of giving the same information, such as utilizing an SMS system in which voters request the information using their mobile phones.</p>
<p>3.3 Emergency Accessible Polling Precinct (EAPP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters were given the option to vote at the EAPP or his assigned clustered precinct.</li> <li>• Those voting in the EAPP were asked to sign an authorization form.</li> <li>• A runner was assigned to retrieve a ballot for the voter from the assigned clustered precinct. Same runner will supposedly return the filled-out ballot to the assigned clustered precinct for the ballot to be scanned. <u>Possible issue</u>: violation of ballot secrecy.</li> <li>• The system of retrieving ballots from the clustered precincts considerably lengthened the time spent by the voter in the EAPP. The NAMFREL observer team followed a senior citizen go through the process, starting at 8am. The participant spent 44 minutes, from entering the voting center to leaving the EAPP. She spent 36 minutes inside the EAPP. Potentially there could be clogging at the EAPPs on election day.</li> </ul>	<p>NAMFREL would like to recommend that the COMELEC explore ways by which the time spent by voters inside the EAPPs could be shortened.</p>
<p>3.4 Clustered Precincts</p> <p>3.4.1 Configuration 1: CP without holding room; ballot issuance, shading, and voting done in same room. <u>Possible issue</u>: potential crowding</p> <p>3.4.2 Configuration 2: Holding room separate from room where ballot issuance, shading, and voting were done.</p> <p>3.4.3 Configuration 3: There were three rooms: holding room; room where ballot issuance and shading was done; and a separate room for ballot casting. <u>Possible issue</u>: opportunity to take photo</p>	<p>NAMFREL suggests limiting the number of people in the different areas (verification area, holding area, polling places).</p>

<p>of ballot.</p>	
<p>General observations at clustered precincts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pens &amp; secrecy folders sanitized after use</li> <li>• Potential violation of ballot secrecy as a member of the EB providing assistance to voter who will cast his/her vote removed the ballot from the secrecy folder. EB also has view of the VVPAT as the EB used a pair of scissors to cut the VVPAT from the machine (machine apparently has no cutter).</li> <li>• Established precincts voters list posted outside of the CP – potential for overcrowding on election day.</li> </ul>	<p>NAMFREL would like to recommend that COMELEC provide voters early with information on their assigned precincts as well as the exact location of said precincts. This is to prevent voters from wandering around or getting lost inside the voting center, and would be especially important if voters would be using rooms that are different from previous elections. COMELEC should try to ensure that these information – in the form of voter information sheets and other means, digital and physical – are delivered to the public a few weeks before election day. COMELEC should also encourage other stakeholders, like election monitoring organizations, to assist in campaigning that the public should not ignore the information given to them, to help assure that there will not be confusion and crowding inside the voting centers on election day.</p> <p>On election day, the COMELEC could also establish information booths in strategic locations inside the voting centers for voters who are unable to find their way. The Commission could also instead assign roving poll workers inside the voting centers who would remind people to observe physical distancing, and at the same time serve as information officers. May we further recommend that a simple name card be worn by the poll workers so that voters who would need assistance could easily identify them.</p> <p>In the sanitation of election materials, NAMFREL encourages the COMELEC to ensure that health-related protocols are implemented consistently throughout the day, and throughout the country on election day.</p>
<p><b>4. PROCESS AND TIMING</b></p>	
<p>The NAMFREL observer team followed and timed participants while going through the simulation process. Here are some of them:</p> <p>Entrance of school, to end of verification process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 8am Senior - 8 min</li> <li>2. 9am Man in his 30s - 4 min</li> <li>3. 11:30am Senior - 9 min</li> <li>4. 1:55 pm - Man in his 40s - 2min</li> <li>5. 2:10pm Senior - 2.5min</li> </ol> <p>Walk from verification area, to time spent inside holding area:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Man in his 30s - 9 min</li> <li>3. 11:30am Senior (did not use Emergency Accessible Polling Place, with holding area) - 9 min</li> </ol>	<p>NAMFREL would like to recommend the following for upcoming simulation exercises:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. NAMFREL would like to recommend the use of a simulation document to be issued to the voter participating in the exercise at the entrance to the voting center. Listed in the simulation document are the various stages: a. Entrance, b. Voter registration verification, c. Voting at EAPP or clustered precinct, d. Exit. Each stage shall be timestamped by the assigned poll workers. The document shall be submitted to the election worker prior to exit.</li> <li>2. Assign role players for IPP procedures and other processes not observed due to</li> </ol>

<p>Entrance to polling place, to voting, to exiting the room</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 8am Senior (voted in Emergency Accessible Polling Place) - 36 minutes</li> <li>2. 9am Man in his 30s - 9.5 min</li> <li>3. 11:30am Senior - 7 min.</li> <li>4. 1:55 pm - Man in his 40s (no holding area) - 3 min</li> <li>5. 2:10pm Senior (did not use EAPP) - 7 min</li> </ol> <p>Total time spent:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 8am Senior - 44 min</li> <li>2. 9am Man in his 30s - 22.5 min</li> <li>3. 11:30am Senior - 26 min.</li> <li>4. 1:55 pm - Man in his 40s – 5 min</li> <li>5. 2:10pm Senior - 9.5 min</li> </ol> <p>Participants who came later in the morning and in the afternoon spent shorter amounts going through the process as the crowd thinned out.</p>	<p>lack of qualified participants.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. If possible, there should be a longer preparation time to ensure proper coordination with barangays concerned and to help assure a bigger turnout of participants. The COMELEC could also consider giving invited participants an incentive to show up (ex. snacks).</li> <li>4. Involve DepEd personnel, or those who will actually serve as members of the Electoral Boards on election day, during the voting simulation exercises, so that they would be familiarized further with the new normal processes.</li> </ol>
<p><b>5. SIGNAGES</b></p> <p>Some signages were too small to be read from afar.</p> <p>Location: EAPP signage was at the entrance to the voter registration verification desks while the voter registration verification area signage was outside and unseen.</p> <p>The team observed some participants not knowing where to go after casting their votes as there were insufficient signages to point them where to go next.</p>	<p>NAMFREL would like to encourage the COMELEC to make signages with font sizes large enough to be read from a distance. Signages should be placed in the appropriate locations to prevent crowding and so that voters would not linger inside the voting center.</p>

We hope that COMELEC would look at our recommendations favorably and that it would again invite NAMFREL to observe forthcoming simulation exercises and testing.

Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,

  
**AUGUSTOC C. LAGMAN**  
National Chairperson

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