



NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)

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PRESS RELEASE

NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan UPDATE #1

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NAMFREL releases preliminary observations on the 2022 National and Local Elections

The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released its preliminary observations on the conduct of the 2022 National and Local Elections, as observed by its volunteers who are currently onsite in different voting centers across the country. NAMFREL has tens of thousands of volunteers observing in voting centers nationwide for today's elections. The preliminary observations cover the opening procedures as well as the first few hours of voting, including arrangements inside the voting centers. Observations are being sent in by authorized NAMFREL volunteers through online forms, paper forms, and the NAMFREL app.

NAMFREL volunteers reported that in general, the conduct of the elections has been smooth and peaceful so far, with most polling places opening on time, no significant delay in the start of voting, with the electoral boards as well as the machines and election paraphernalia complete in most polling places observed.

This morning's activities are characterized by a high turnout of voters especially in urban areas, with voters lining up in the hundreds outside many voting centers even before the polls opened at 6am.

The high turnout though seemed to have overwhelmed many voting centers, in which anti-Covid protocols were not properly enforced and observed, most especially physical distancing and proper wearing of face masks. Temperatures are also not consistently being checked at the entrance to the voting center. It also affected voting centers' effectiveness in handling the flow of voters going inside the voting centers, which also resulted in crowding outside polling places and in corridors.

Opening process

NAMFREL observers noted that in most polling places observed, the opening process went on smoothly, and the members of the electoral board (EB) were transparent and appeared well-organized. However, some NAMFREL volunteers reported non-adherence to prescribed procedures. In Pototan, Iloilo, a NAMFREL observer reported that there was no uniformity in the sealing of the ballot box: one was sealed by packing tape while another was with a cable tie. There were reports of the machines not working as expected, but the members of the EBs eventually were able to fix the issues prior to voting. In Quezon City, a NAMFREL volunteer reported that a VCM was not delivered until 6:30am.

There was also the perennial problem of voters unable to find their polling places. A NAMFREL volunteer in San Juan City reported that many voters could not find their polling places because they did not know their clustered precinct number, because they were only informed of their polling place numbers. Some voting centers also did not have a map where voters could have checked the location of their clustered precinct.

Voting

NAMFREL observers reported that in most polling places observed, voting has been going on smoothly so far, with voters taking anywhere between 5 minutes and 1 hour to go through the voting process, from lining up outside the room, to voting, to exiting the room. However, most voters took between 10 and 20 minutes. Most polling places observed allowed up to 10 voters inside at any given time.

NAMFREL notes the effort of the COMELEC in putting in place anti-Covid protocols, like the checking of temperature in the entrance to voting centers, but some protocols were not being strictly enforced and followed, especially physical distancing and proper wearing of face masks.

While reports indicate that voting has been smooth in most polling places observed, there have been also many reports from NAMFREL volunteers related to the vote counting machines (VCMs), notably issues of paper jam and machines rejecting ballots or shutting down. In Quezon City, a NAMFREL volunteer reported that according to an EB chairperson, it seems the ballot papers are softer than the previous ballot papers used, which resulted to the paper not being able to be fed into the machines, prompting the jam. In Angat, Bulacan, a VCM had to be brought to Malolos and returned to the polling place when it stopped issuing the VVPAT (voter-verified paper audit trail). A VCM also did not produce the receipt in a polling place in Ermita, Manila. Another NAMFREL volunteer in Quezon City reported that their VCM stopped working and the EB asked the voters to leave their ballots behind which they will feed into the VCM when it is working again. NAMFREL is still verifying a report from volunteers in Abra of VCMs being pulled out for repair and voters being asked to wait to be able to vote.

Voting centers

NAMFREL volunteers also observed that in some voting centers, there are people wearing campaign shirts and paraphernalia. In Pilar, Abra, NAMFREL volunteers reported witnessing a commotion between some citizens arm volunteers and supporters of a presidential candidate, who were wearing campaign shirts. Teachers there advised the supporters to just wear their shirts inside out so that they could be allowed entry. Almost half of reports received indicated that there is unnecessary crowding or loitering inside the voting center. Many people also could not find the exit after voting due to absence of ineffective placement of directional signages.

NAMFREL commends the COMELEC for the use of the Emergency Accessible Polling Places (EAPP) and Isolation Polling Places (IPP). NAMFREL volunteers observed that they are being utilized by many voters. A NAMFREL volunteer in Quezon City, however, noted that in their voting center, "EAPP process is disorganized. It takes a while for them to get ballots and seniors are getting impatient. One was given a ballot but not a marker so she used her own pen until an EB noticed it. 2 incidents of exchanged IDs and ballots (senior A ended up answering ballot of senior B and vice versa)"

NAMFREL is still in the process of verifying reports coming from volunteers in Aurora of five trucks being apprehended in San Luis town, with one truck reportedly containing guns, money, and sample ballots.

NAMFREL will continue observing the different processes of the elections throughout the day and week, and will release another update soon, covering afternoon voting, counting, transmission of results, and canvassing. NAMFREL will submit to COMELEC a more comprehensive report with recommendations after it has gathered all observations from the field.

*NAMFREL is the first citizens-led, national election monitoring organization in the world. Since 1983, it has been accredited by the COMELEC as its citizens' arm. For the 2022 elections, NAMFREL has again been accredited, and has fielded volunteers across the country to observe the pre-election, Election Day, and post-election periods. NAMFREL encourages Filipinos to continue to be vigilant and to help ensure that the vote count will be transparent by downloading and using the NAMFREL app:
Android (Google Play Store): <https://bit.ly/NAMFRELEApp>
iPhone (App Store): <https://apple.co/3MEKB40>*