



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

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### **NAMFREL Report on the Limited Observation of the Resumption of Voter Registration August 10, 2022**

#### **Introduction**

NAMFREL's limited observation of the 2022 Voter Registration process aimed to gather verified and concrete information on the conduct of registration at the local level, to be used by NAMFREL in crafting policy recommendations to further improve the different processes related to Philippine electoral exercises, especially the voter registration process. The activity was in line with NAMFREL's goal to help assist the Commission on Elections (Comelec) in getting as many Filipinos as possible to register for the 2022 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (2022 BSKE), as well as to provide a third-party citizen oversight of electoral processes. The activity was done in coordination with local Comelec offices, and in accordance with health regulations in place.

Twenty (20) NAMFREL chapters from all over the country were pre-selected to participate in the observation. These chapters were chosen for regional representation, recent performance as indicator for likelihood of ability to carry out the task on short notice, and the chapters' already established relationship with their Comelec counterparts.

Each chapter was instructed to deploy at least one observer to observe the voter registration process, and to submit at least two (2) observation forms: either observing the same voter registration center on two different days, or to observe two voter registration centers during the registration period. The observers were instructed to be physically present to observe the process for at least one hour each time.

The observers were guided by an observation form/questionnaire, in paper form and in Google Forms version to facilitate ease of submission of data to NAMFREL national headquarters. There were 49 questions on the form based on Comelec's published guidelines for the resumption of voter registration (COMELEC Resolution No. 10798).

To further prepare the volunteers for the observation, an online briefing was held on July 6, 2022 to discuss each question in the observation form to ensure that everybody understood the information they needed to get.

#### **NAMFREL Observation**

The observation of voter registration centers was carried out by twenty (20) NAMFREL chapters in the areas enumerated below.

##### Luzon:

La Union  
Rizal  
Batangas  
Quezon  
Catanduanes  
Sorsogon

##### NCR:

Las Piñas  
Mandaluyong  
Muntinlupa  
Quezon City

Visayas:  
Guimaras  
Iloilo  
Leyte

Negros Oriental

Mindanao:  
Misamis Oriental  
Zamboanga del Sur  
Basilan  
South Cotabato  
Maguindanao  
Cotabato City

NAMFREL chapters carried out their observations throughout the voter registration period, from July 4 to 23, 2022. NAMFREL expected to receive 40 filled out observation forms, but since many chapters volunteered to observe in more registration centers within their area or more times than they were asked to, NAMFREL actually received 72 filled out observation forms, covering about 40 different registration centers; some registration centers were observed multiple times by NAMFREL chapters in the area over the course of the period.

Critical information that were gleaned from the observation activity were:

- Enforcement and adherence to health and safety protocols
- Physical characteristics of COMELEC offices / registration centers
- Number of registrants
- Total time spent by registrants inside the registration centers

Some specific activities monitored in the registration centers were entry procedures, the registration proper, adherence to health and safety guidelines, and the registration environment.

## Findings

Below is a summary of the findings of the observation, based on the filled-out observation forms submitted by participating NAMFREL chapters.

### On registration procedures:

More than half of the observations submitted indicated that some form of measure or scheme to limit the number of registrants per day was implemented in the registration center. The centers put a limit of 100 to 1000 registrants per day, but in most registration centers observed it was 300 per day. However, some registration centers allowed more people to register if the limit was reached earlier than expected. In Cotabato City, volunteers reported that people arrived as early as 4am to ensure that they will have a spot in the day's quota of registrants.

About 78% of observations indicated that the registration center only accepted walk-in registrants. Volunteers from Negros Oriental and Catanduanes said that the registration centers they observed used an appointment system, which was done through Facebook or phone calls. Some observers said that it would have been better if an appointment system was used. They were reportedly told by Comelec staff that fewer people went to register during weekdays, which led to an overflow of people on Saturdays and in the last few days of the registration period.

Notably, the iRehistro system, available during the voter registration period before the 2022 NLE, was not online this time.

Almost all observers reported that registrants got their blank forms from the registration center on the same day. However, observers noted that a large number of registrants spent a long time queuing just to get the said forms.

In registration centers located in several places such as Lucena, Muntinlupa, Mandaluyong, Cotabato, Pagadian, Datu Odin Sinsuat, and Cagayan de Oro, observers reported seeing registrants being sent home for the following reasons: being underaged; not having a valid ID or some other requirements; cut off for the day was already reached; senior citizens not accompanied by immediate family members; and having incomplete forms.

Most observers did not observe any disruption to the registration process at the time of observation. However, the large turnout of registrants in many registration centers caused delays for many

people. In the satellite registration center in Mandaluyong City located in SM Megamall, due to the computer system's ability to process only a certain number of applications per hour, many registrants had to wait for hours without assurance that they can get accommodated on the same day. In Sorsogon City, lack of visible and clear signages regarding the process that registrants had to go through caused delay and confusion.

#### On health and safety protocols:

NAMFREL observers reported that the No Face Mask-No Registration policy was strictly enforced and followed in the majority of the registration centers observed, and most centers were well-ventilated.

Among the Covid protocols in place, 68% of observations indicated that maintaining physical distancing was not strictly enforced or followed, while 68% also indicated that disinfection of hands was not enforced or followed.

Some other observations pertaining to Covid protocols at the time of observation:

- 37% reported that body temperature was not being checked before entry
- Only 58% reported that the registration center used glass windows and/or plastic/acrylic barriers for interaction with registrants. In the SM Megamall satellite registration center in Mandaluyong City, observers noted that plastic barrier was present in the venue but it was not used.
- 60% reported that there were no markings/stickers on floors or hallways and on chairs or benches for physical distancing to be followed by registrants
- 67% reported that registrants were not being required to sanitize their hands before signing in the signature pad and imprinting their thumbprints in the fingerprint scanner
- 68% reported that registrants were not being required to sanitize their hands before and after biometrics capturing
- 71% reported that registration peripherals like fingerprint scanner, signature pad and pen were not being disinfected after every use
- 74% reported that registrants themselves were not being asked to sanitize the equipment and peripherals they used (as stipulated in Comelec rules)

#### On physical characteristics of COMELEC offices / registration centers:

Voter registration centers observed by NAMFREL volunteers were a mix of satellite registration centers such as malls and basketball courts, as well as Comelec offices. In La Union, observers noted that many registrants did not appear informed that conducting registration in a satellite location meant that the Comelec office would be closed.

Most observers said that the registration center they were observing was big enough for the activity. However, in Muntinlupa City, while the voter registration observed in two barangays took place in basketball courts, they still proved not spacious enough for the crowd as the venues are multiple-use, and other regular barangay activities were simultaneously taking place (e.g. barangay clearance) as they were regular work days.

Observers noted that there was an express lane provided for vulnerable sectors (senior citizens, PWDs, pregnant people, etc.) in most registration centers observed. However, observers in Dumaguete, Muntinlupa, Pagadian, Iloilo, Koronadal, Lamitan, and some others, said that there was no express lane in the center they observed. In at least one registration center observed (in Mandaluyong City), said lane was not followed and was also used by registrants who do not belong to said vulnerable groups.

Only 66% of observations received indicated that the registration center had enough furniture for seating, for accomplishment of forms, for use in the waiting area (if any), and for other activities.

While there were tables for accomplishing forms, observers noted that they were clearly not enough, and the registrants resorted to filling out the forms on the floor or in their chairs. Observers noted that registrants felt uncomfortable and struggled during the process. Waiting areas were also of limited capacity and did not have enough chairs, which made it impossible for registrants to practice physical distancing. The rainy season also made things worse as some centers were not prepared for inclement weather.

Some registration centers observed were located inside cinemas. Observers noted that lighting inside these venues was insufficient, which made it difficult for the registrants to fill out their forms.

However, observers noted that in almost all registration centers observed, there was an adequate number of personnel, and that the registration/Comelec personnel appear well-trained or knowledgeable of their tasks, describing them as accommodating, respectful, and patient. 100% of observers also noted that all registration equipment functioned normally during observation, and that all needed registration equipment and materials were complete.

#### On the number of registrants:

Of the number of observations received by NAMFREL, 6.9% saw less than 20 people at the time of observation; 29.2% had 21 to 50 registrants; 19.4% had 51 to 75; 2.8% had 76 to 100; while 47% said that there were more than 100 people who registered during their time inside the registration center.

#### On the total time spent by registrants inside the center:

Of the number of observations received by NAMFREL, 38.9% said registrants spent 10 to 20 minutes inside the registration center; 19.4% said 21-45 minutes; 6.9% said 46 minutes to 1 hour; while 34.7% said registrants spent more than 1 hour to go through the process.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

NAMFREL commends Comelec officers and staff throughout the country for being frontliners in ensuring that the 2022 Voter Registration Process was conducted in a safe and efficient manner.

#### For Comelec

To help further enhance future voter registration activities and the preparations for the holding of the 2022 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE), still amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, NAMFREL would like to offer the following recommendations to the Comelec:

- Ensure consistency in implementation of anti-Covid measures. While Comelec's anti-Covid measures were generally implemented and adhered to, they were done so in varying levels of consistency and adherence;
- Further train election personnel in procedures as prescribed in Comelec guidelines, especially in ensuring that anti-Covid measures are strictly enforced, like in the disinfection of election materials and furniture;
- Further encourage registrants to download and print their own forms, or to make paper forms available in advance in other locations like barangay offices, to reduce queueing in the registration centers and to avoid crowding in the section where they are filled out;
- Consider having a longer voter registration period to allow more people to register;
- To help decrease the crowding in voter registration centers, the Comelec could: (a) Use an appointment system and to announce this in advance, so that registrants could be distributed evenly throughout the registration period; (b) Consider conducting the voter registration per

barangay, within the barangays themselves so that registrants will not have to travel far from their places of residence; (c) Consider having more satellite registration centers like malls and other large venues, for the convenience of registrants; (d) For Sangguniang Kabataan, consider conducting voter registration in schools. This would also allow schools to help instill responsible citizenship and the value of the right of suffrage to their students; (e) Consider holding voter registration even on Sundays for people who work throughout the week;

- Inside voter registration centers, provide more furniture like chairs and tables for the convenience of registrants and to ensure enough physical distancing;
- Inside voter registration centers, consider installing more windows or counters so that more registrants could be processed at any given time;
- Inside voter registration centers, the Comelec should require putting up signages that would explain to the registrants the flow of the whole registration process, on boards that could easily be read and understood, so that registrants may be guided accordingly, and to help decrease lingering and loitering inside registration centers;
- Explore ways to conduct voter registration remotely or via electronic means that would not require or substantially lessen the need for physical appearance inside Comelec facilities or other voter registration venues.

### For Congress

In addition, NAMFREL calls on the Legislature to consider passing a law allowing a data sharing agreement between the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and the Comelec in order to dispense with the voter registration process. This would save time and costs not only for the local Comelec offices but also for would-be voters who have to line up even before the sun has risen just to be able to submit their applications.

The Legislature may study and adopt the system used in Indonesia, where the government is mandated to provide data on the population of potential election voters to be used by the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU) for compiling the voters list. The data given to KPU comes from people registered in the electronic "Citizen Identity Card" scheme, the national ID system of their country.

NAMFREL also calls on the Legislature to consider passing a law mandating the PSA and the Civil Registrars nationwide to submit to the Comelec the information of deceased persons so that they can be purged from the voter registration database. NAMFREL also urges that a law be passed allowing data on citizens turning 15 years old for purposes of the SK elections, and 18 years old for purposes of regular elections, plebiscites, referenda, etc., to be shared by the Civil Registrars with COMELEC. In all instances, these would be subject to Data Sharing Agreements in accordance with Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act.

Finally, NAMFREL urges the Legislature to repeal *"Any person who did not vote in the two (2) successive preceding regular elections as shown by their voting records"* as a ground for deactivation under Section 27 of Republic Acts No. 8189 (for local voters) and 9189, as amended by R.A. 10590 (for overseas voters). Voters should not be penalized for the failure to exercise their right to choose our leaders, and then line up before sunrise to apply for reactivation. Instead, they should be encouraged to vote through the adoption of voting technology (for example, Internet voting) and/or mechanisms (polling places close to their residences), and enlightened on the importance of their choice and how they can exercise it.

If the reason for including failure to vote as a ground for deactivation is that those who failed to vote may have done so because of death, this would be addressed by the PSA and the Civil Registrars nationwide submitting information of deceased persons to the Comelec. ###