



NAMFREL

+63 8470 4151 • +63 8451 1586
namfrelsecretariat@namfrel.org.ph
www.namfrel.org.ph

National Citizens' Movement For Free Elections
Unit 601, DMG Center, Domingo M. Guevara St.,
Brgy. Mauway, Mandaluyong City, Philippines, 1550

MEDIA RELEASE

NAMFREL Bantay ng Bayan BULLETIN #1

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NAMFREL releases preliminary observations on the 2025 National and Local Elections

Mandaluyong City - The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) released its preliminary observations on the conduct of the 2025 National and Local Elections, as observed by its volunteers who are currently onsite in different voting centers across the country. NAMFREL has been accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as citizens' arm for the 2025 NLE, and NAMFREL chapters have deployed teams of volunteers to observe the election day procedures in the voting centers. 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 direct messages.

NAMFREL observers 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 for early voting at 5am. NAMFREL observers reported that COMELEC Electoral Boards (EBs) appear well-prepared in general, citing their adequate handling of the process inside the polling places. Observers also reported that early voting started on time at 5am. However, early voting started late in some voting centers, that regular voters were let in even if many members of the vulnerable sectors were still in queue to vote.

Inside voting centers, the general observation so far, however, is that problems arise depending on the turnout in the first few hours of operation: in voting centers where observers noted high voter turnout, problems were observed such as overcrowding in voter assistance desks, in holding areas, and hallways, lack of chairs for members of the vulnerable sectors to sit, and inability of VAD assistants and volunteer assistants to meet the demand. As of 11:30am, NAMFREL observers reported high voter turnout in more than 83% of voting centers observed. Like in previous elections, it was also observed that a big part of the voters' time spent inside the voting center was trying to determine whether they are on the voter list, trying to find their precinct number, and trying to locate their polling place: information that voters could have already obtained, or have been provided to them, prior to election day. Despite the high demand for voter assistance, observers cited the importance and usefulness of Voter Assistance Desks (VADs) and onsite volunteers in facilitating the conduct of the voting process. Observers noted the presence of VADs in more than 93% of voting centers observed so far.



Some specific observations received:

1. Observers in Rizal Elementary School in Taguig and Nemesio I. Yabut Senior High School in Makati City reported that said voting centers were crowded and chaotic. Waiting rooms were full, and many people were in the hallways. Many senior citizens were also lined up outside polling places in Tandang Sora Elementary School, Quezon City.
2. In Las Piñas City National Science High School, many senior citizens availed of the early voting hours. The result was that they had to wait to vote, similar to regular voting.
3. In Dr. Sixto Antonio Elementary School, Pasig City, observers reported that voters had difficulty finding their names, leading to long lines, and one voter almost did not find their name.
4. In Pasig Elementary School, some voters who had to work on election day tried to avail of early voting but failed.
5. Meanwhile, in Kaligayahan Elementary School in Quezon City, observers reported orderly lines of voters and assistance to them.
6. No priority lane was observed in a polling place in Rizal Elementary School in Taguig.
7. Three-fourths (or 75.1%) of NAMFREL observers reported so far that voting has been proceeding continuously. Forty-five percent of observers reported that voters took 1-10 minutes to vote, while almost 30 percent (29.9%) took 11-20 minutes. Only one-fourth (24.9%) reported problems. The following problems were reported:
8. Voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) printing jams, which were fixed: One polling place in Moonwalk Elementary School, Las Pinas City; one polling place in Pardo Elementary School in Cebu City (took 10 minutes to fix affecting 6 voters)
9. ACMs not reading some ballots because they were flagged as “Invalid Ballots”. These issues were quickly resolved through the Department of Education Supervisory Officials (DESO) IT Support Staff: One polling place in Don Carlos Village Elementary School, Pasay City; One polling place in Artacho Elementary School, Sison, Pangasinan, one polling place in Pasig Elementary School; one polling place in Narra LRCS, San Pedro, Laguna
10. Ballots with stray marks (madumi) rejected by ACMs as “misread ballots”. These were eventually accepted by the ACMs after a short time, with delays not affecting voting: One polling place in Andres Bonifacio Elementary School in Manila, one polling place in Maligaya Elementary School, Quezon City; Cagamutan Norte in Iloilo; one polling place in Narra LRCS, San Pedro, Laguna; one polling place in Pasig Elementary School
11. A ballot was not read because of black marks on the screen. The EB cleaned the screen by wiping it with tissue: One polling place in Pamplona Elementary School Central, Las Piñas
12. Some ballots were not read because they would be spit out by the machine if the ballots had folds. Cleaning the ACM roller solved this issue: One polling place in Camputhaw Elementary School, Cebu City; one polling place in San Isidro Elementary School, Surigao City; one polling place in Bitano Elementary School, Legazpi, Albay;
13. Ballots being rejected, requiring the EB to call for repair: One polling place in Dr. Sixto Elementary School, Pasig City
14. A ballot was flagged as “Invalid” because of stray inks. This ballot was accepted after 4 attempts: One polling place in Pasig Elementary School

The following violations of the secrecy of the ballot were observed:

1. Electoral Boards (EBs), instead of voters, were feeding the ballots to the Automated Counting Machines (ACMs): One polling place in Rizal Elementary School in Taguig
2. Ballot secrecy folders were not used: One polling place in Las Piñas City National Science High School
3. Voters talking about who they voted for: One polling place in Las Piñas City National Science High School, one polling place in Pasig Elementary School
4. Voters talking with other voters or watchers: One polling place in San Miguel Elementary School, Calasiao, Pangasinan; one polling place in Maligaya Elementary School, Quezon City
5. Ballots visible to other voters: one polling place in Highway Hills Integrated School
6. Ballot secrecy folders not enough: one polling place in Pardo Elementary School, Cebu City

NAMFREL is currently verifying with its NAMFREL chapters some incidents reported whether they are election-related. NAMFREL will include them in forthcoming Bulletins once verified by the NAMFREL volunteers on the ground. NAMFREL will continue to gather observations throughout the day. Voting will end at 7pm, and counting and canvassing of votes will commence after that.

The general public are encouraged to download the NAMFREL 2025 app from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store and participate in the NAMFREL Operation QR Count 2025 (OQC 2025). Filipinos can use the app to scan the QR codes of the election returns (ERs) posted outside polling places during today's counting period to help independently verify electronically transmitted results. NAMFREL will make available the transmitted results it received on the NAMFREL website.

As part of NAMFREL Operation QR Count 2025, NAMFREL volunteers will also be scanning the QR codes of the voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) in 60 selected clustered precincts around the country. This will be done using a NAMFREL-developed app for exclusive use of these volunteers, and in the presence of COMELEC-assigned representatives.

The NAMFREL National Headquarters in Mandaluyong City is receiving and verifying election observations from NAMFREL volunteers all over the country. NAMFREL is also operating an off-site Election Data Analytics Center in partnership with the Asia Pacific College and Geodata. The analytics center, located in Asia Pacific College in Makati City, will process and handle election data for analysis and further insights.

NAMFREL will be submitting a final report to the COMELEC on the findings of the observation, identifying areas that could be further strengthened, and recommending measures to help ensure the conduct of safer and more efficient electoral exercises.

NAMFREL encourages Filipinos to continue to be vigilant and to help ensure that elections will be peaceful, and that the vote count will be transparent. ###