

Safeguard the Bangsamoro Vote: A critical period to transcend violence in the region

Period coverage: June - July 2026

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Authorities implement COMELEC checkpoints across Maguindanao del Norte in preparation for the first-ever Bangsamoro Parliamentary Elections, which are scheduled for September 14, 2026. The operations are being carried out as part of efforts to enforce the election gun ban, which took effect on July 16, 2026.

Photo courtesy of Maguindanao del Norte PPO.

Boto Mo Bangsamoro: Expanded election monitoring in Muslim Mindanao

Boto Mo Bangsamoro! launches today, which serves as Climate Conflict Action Asia's (CCAA) expanded election monitoring in Muslim Mindanao. This monitoring aims to address critical information gaps and capture the evolving dynamics of violence and conflict in the run-up towards the first Bangsamoro Parliamentary election in September and the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (BSK) elections in November.¹

Boto Mo Bangsamoro! is grounded in CCAA's longstanding Conflict Alert monitoring system, the real-time Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), and the Early Response Network (ERN) that allows the delivery of timely, granular, and verified updates straight from communities across Muslim Mindanao. This initiative is designed to serve as a trusted source of real-time reports with strong quality control features and contextual analysis for media, stakeholders, and decision-makers during elections.

Beginning today, **Boto Mo Bangsamoro!** will deliver fortnightly a rundown of conflict incidents as captured by the CEMS-ERN, containing thematic analysis of conflict patterns, violent strings, and actor behaviour, accompanied by a detailed listing of incidents by municipality. On election day, the platform will release reports every three hours (9 AM to 9 PM) to inform the public of emerging hotspots and security concerns.

Boto Mo Bangsamoro! builds upon CCAA's previous election monitoring platform, originally launched ahead of the May 2025 midterm elections, which served as an autonomous barometer in identifying hotspots, tracking election-related violence, and enabling rapid response. Boto Mo Bangsamoro! will be expanded through CCAA and DXMS' Aksyon Alerto radio programme and its reports will be supplied to the Independent Election Monitoring Center (IEMC), a joint multi-stakeholder initiative that bridges state, non-state, and civil society efforts to ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections.²

Convergence of two election seasons

This expanded and enhanced monitoring platform comes at a critical period with two democratic exercises set to take place within the same election season. The Bangsamoro Parliamentary election marks a significant milestone in the political settlement in the region as it will reflect the will of the people and consolidate the political legitimacy of its leaders. There are promising signs that the election in the Bangsamoro will finally proceed in September when President Bongbong Marcos declared that the election will be peaceful and credible during his recent State of the Nation Address. People in the region are anticipating this long-overdue election with renewed optimism after being postponed four times since 2022.

However, this comes alongside longstanding conflict risks associated with election periods, as well as other challenges that will unfold such as the onset of the flooding season. CCAA's conflict monitoring system has consistently shown a historical pattern in which violence in Muslim Mindanao spikes during election years. The convergence of the Parliamentary and the BSK elections is creating conditions for heightened political activity and increased risk of election-related violence. This risk will be especially pronounced in the barangay elections, where contests are often personal and shaped by kinship ties. In addition, this election season follows two of the deadliest electoral cycles that have occurred in the Bangsamoro in recent years.³

¹While the platform is geared towards election monitoring, it will continue to capture incidents beyond those related to the elections as evidence have shown how other causes and drivers of conflict can morph and escalate into political violence.

² Aksyon Alerto! is a radio programme that informs the public about critical events and emerging issues that impact the peace, security, and development of the Bangsamoro and neighbouring areas. The programme airs Mondays to Fridays from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM on DXMS Radyo Bida 882 Cotabato City and Facebook Live broadcast on DXMS Radyo Bida and Climate Conflict Action. Boto Bangsamoro supplied an additional 759 incident reports during the 2025 mid-term elections to the IEMC. The platform's evidence base prompted heightened attention from COMELEC and security actors and elevated the reality of election violence in BARMM to the national level, ensuring that the region's experience was not obscured by aggregate nationwide reporting.

This will be further compounded by risks brought about by natural disasters where humanitarian pressures and displacement may unfold during the same period. In September last year, 29 towns in the Bangsamoro, mostly those adjacent to the Liguasan Marsh, were flooded affecting more than 45,000 residents.⁴

The risks are already manifest and are likely to intensify as the campaign period begins today, July 30. CCAA’s Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) has already recorded 229 incidents and 85

deaths since the filing of certificate of candidacy began in May 2026 (Table 1). While violent conflict incidents were higher on the first quarter of the year, these were largely driven by a series of attacks and retaliations between the military and violent extremist groups. The period of May to July, however, saw violence involving local government officials as the election season began. The gun ban has yet to deter violence as CEMS recorded at least 24 incidents involving the use of guns and explosives since it took effect on July 16, averaging nearly two incidents per day.

Table 1. Number of incidents and deaths in Muslim Mindanao, January-July* 2026

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Incidents	102	74	96	110	76	85	68
Deaths	24	33	36	57	26	28	31

*Data for July covers only from July 1-28

Escalating political violence

Violent incidents involving local government and barangay officials intensified, most of which are fuelled by unresolved political rivalries from the 2025 midterm elections. The most alarming case occurred in the municipalities of Nabalawag and Kadayangan in the Special Geographic Area (SGA), which involves the incumbent mayor of Nabalawag himself and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commanders. The violence, which has recurred since March this year, stems from a long-standing rido and has since escalated into political violence, drawing in other actors and triggering strings of conflict: on July 16, a municipal councilor of Kadayangan was killed and four days later, a firefight displaced around 1,500 households.⁵

In Maguindanao del Sur, an ambush attack targeted the group of the barangay chairman of Tugal, Sultan sa Barongis on June 4. Another clan feud was reignited on June 12 in Rajah Buayan following a gunfight between two groups, one reportedly affiliated with the MILF and the other, a former barangay chairman and aligned with traditional

politicians. In Brgy. Sibuto, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte, tensions arose on July 9 when supporters of opposing political groups clashed after one of the parties sought to assume the barangay chairmanship upon being declared the winner of a 2022 election protest.

Meanwhile, a strafing incident occurred in Pualas, Lanao del Sur on June 4 between two cousins who have since become political rivals, following reports that around 3,000 voter registrations were transferred into the municipality. Pualas has become a political battleground between two prominent clans, in which the mayoralty position had shifted back and forth between the rival families in the previous two elections.

³ Barangay polls in 2023 most violent since 2010. *Inquirer*, 2023. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1858436/this-years-bske-most-violent-village-elections-since-2010>; Midterm polls in BARMM deadlier than 2023 barangay elections – watchdog. *Rappler*, 23 June 2025. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/barmm-election-violence-climate-conflict-action-asia-report-2025/>

⁴ 29 BARMM towns flooded. *BusinessWorld*. 2025. <https://bworldonline.com/the-nation/2025/09/24/700756/29-barmm-towns-flooded/>

⁵ 5 dead, 20,000 displaced in clashes in BARMM town. *Inquirer*, 12 March 2026. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2194344/5-dead-20000-displaced-in-clashes-in-barmm-town>

Divisions within the MILF leadership heightens tensions and violence within their ranks

The faction within the MILF leadership, which has increasingly manifested as a political rivalry between the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) and the Bangsamoro Federalist Party (BFP) became more pronounced in June after the MILF Central Committee suspended Abdulraof Macacua from his position as Chief-of-Staff of the MILF-BIAF.⁶ This was subsequently followed by the replacement of eight base commanders, after they were suspended by the Central Committee for pledging allegiance to the BFP. This would cause tension such as in Basilan where a Member of Parliament and former Commander of the 114th Base Command continued to assert his leadership, despite having been replaced by the Central Committee.⁷ Since then, both the UBJP and BFP have staged competing rallies across the Bangsamoro region in a show of political strength.

These divisions have also had implications on the ground. This weakened their ability to control their members coupled by the absence of mechanisms to control the weapons that remain in their possession are contributing to violence within their ranks. Violent incidents involving MILF-affiliated actors have occurred across the Bangsamoro region, mostly in the SGA and Maguindanao del Sur.⁸ In Maguindanao del Sur, a firefight due to rido occurred between commanders of the 128th Base Command and the 118th Base Command of the MILF on July 12 in Brgy. Duguengen, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, resulting to at least 2,000 families displaced. In Datu Hoffer, a senior official of the MILF 128th Base Command was killed by armed men on June 12. In the SGA, a local government employee with close links to a former MILF Commander, was shot dead on June 9 in Tugunan. Another attack occurred in Malidegao municipality on June 20, where the nephew of an MILF commander was targeted in a shooting, reportedly in connection to an ongoing clan feud.



Residents of Kadayangan, SGA flee to safety due to a firefight on July 20. The conflict stems from a long standing rido between two major clans in the area.
Photo by CCAA-ERN.

Emergence of new armed actors and the continued threat of extremist groups

The presence of existing armed groups, such as the Dawla Islamiyah (DI), continue to pose a security threat in the lead up to the elections. The previous weeks saw successive military operations against the DI, particularly those behind the ambush-killing of five PNP officers in March in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao del Sur. On June 5, the military clashed with DI members in two separate encounters in Brgy. Pimbalkan and Brgy. Daladap in Mamasapano. The military landed a significant blow to the DI with the killing of Esmael Abubakar, or Commander Bungos, on July 5 in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao del Norte. However, on July 18, just two days after the election gun ban took effect, twin bombing attacks targeting security personnel occurred in separate occasions in Sultan Kudarat and Shariff Aguak. A day later, another explosion targeting the military was reported in Shariff Saydona Mustapha.

This period has also seen the emergence of new armed groups, such as the Panenekelan Group, which has been associated in extremist and criminal activities in Maguindanao del Sur.⁹ This group first came to light in 2024 but has since been involved in violent incidents throughout this year. The military launched hot pursuit operations against the group for their involvement in the killing of police officers

⁶ The MILF Central Committee suspended Macacua on the grounds of “defiance and insubordination” against the MILF leadership. *Rappler*. <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/mindanao/milf-suspends-military-chief-barmm-interim-minister-macacua/>

⁷ MP Dan Asnawie served as the commander of the 114th Base Command in Basilan, before he was suspended and placed on indefinite leave by the MILF Central Committee for shifting to the BFP. *MindaNews*. <https://mindanews.com/top-stories/2026/06/milf-initiates-loyalty-check-in-basilan-following-change-in-leadership/>

⁸ One may argue that MILF-affiliated actors may act on their own and the interests of their clans and not necessarily that of the MILF organisation. However, their links to the MILF and other groups guarantees their access to weapons and ammunitions and can mobilise its members in cases of revenge and retaliation (International Alert 2020).

in Shariff Aguak.¹⁰ Of particular concern is also the reported involvement of young individuals within the group, and their widespread social media content openly showcasing and actively firing their weapons. On July 21, the military confiscated high-powered firearms and explosive devices in a hideout occupied by the Panenekelan group in Brgy. Tukanalipao, Mamasapano. Two days later, two members were arrested by the military, one of whom is an Alternative Learning System student.

These groups can be mobilised to sow fear, intimidation, and violence and the election season provides these armed groups with opportunities to hire out their services to political actors and its supporters.

Conclusions and recommendations

The security situation of this election period remains volatile, marked by heightened political contestation, recurring clan feuding, incidents of violent extremism, and emerging risks that could undermine the credibility of the first Bangsamoro Parliamentary election. The following recommendations aim to mitigate these risks and support the peaceful, credible, and democratic elections. Several of the recommendations presented by CCAA in the previous year remain relevant:



Supporters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) gathered outside the Bangsamoro Government Center on 25 June 2026. This is the second rally organised by its supporters calling for the restitution of Murad Ebrahim as Chief Minister of the BARMM, reinstate the 41 nominees of the MILF in the Parliament, and to ensure the full implementation of the CAB. Photo by CCAA-ERN

- **Strict and impartial enforcement of the gun ban.** This is particularly critical in this current period given the stalled decommissioning process and weapons still in the hands of the MILF as they participate in the elections. Checkpoint operations should be implemented more rigorously, with personnel conducting thorough inspections rather than merely monitoring for compliance. Beyond the temporary enforcement of the election gun ban, broader and sustained efforts to regulate firearms use and ownership, strengthen accountability measures, and piloting alternative pathways on the decommissioning process, are imperative to curb the proliferation of illicit firearms and reduce the risk of armed violence beyond the electoral period.
- **COMELEC and security sector must maintain impartiality in the enforcement of its policies and protocols.** The COMELEC stands as the institution entrusted with safeguarding the integrity of democratic exercises. Yet, questions surrounding its credibility and perceived bias have undermined public confidence in previous electoral processes. To strengthen the confidence of the electoral outcome and prevent a failure of elections, the COMELEC must take concrete steps to demonstrate neutrality, such as preventing the midnight reshuffling of municipal election officers and ensuring full compliance with its own rules and regulations.

At the same time, security forces must also be seen as impartial actors, particularly with more than 10,000 personnel from both the PNP and AFP expected to be deployed to secure the polls.¹¹ A heightened military and police presence alone does not guarantee peaceful and orderly elections, rather their impartiality are necessary to protect voters, candidates, and the integrity of the electoral process.

- **Ensure COMELEC preparedness for potential disruptions caused by natural disasters and calamities.** While much attention has been directed toward political and security-related risks, equal focus should also be given to climate-related threats, particularly as the elections will coincide with

⁹ The military reported that its leader was also an alleged bomb maker for the BIFF and DI. *Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2269432/army-recovers-guns-explosives-after-clash-with-maguindanao-terrorists>

¹⁰ Maguindanao del Sur Police Provincial Office. 23 April 2026. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1255759736709599&set=a.585498937069019&type=3&rdid=PAHptiU4oX9uSBsa&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F1bcB1mQ612%2F

the flooding season in the Bangsamoro region. These risks could affect voter accessibility and turnout and the deployment of election personnel and paraphernalia. This includes identification of hazard-prone areas for strategic planning and clustering of polling precincts as a contingency measure should certain locations become inaccessible due to flooding. Strengthened coordination among the COMELEC, disaster response agencies, and security forces will be critical and essential for continuity of electoral operations. Should a postponement of the election be deemed necessary due to a natural calamity, the COMELEC must ensure the integrity and transparency of the electoral process.

- **Strengthen community-based election monitors and watchdog mechanisms.** The first Parliamentary election in the Bangsamoro presents significant stakes for all candidates. Given the high stakes and competition, candidates and their supporters are expected

to undertake extensive efforts to secure victory, which poses risks of irregularity, electoral misconduct, and election-related violence. It is integral therefore that community-based monitors and watchdogs, particularly those that are often disenfranchised, such as the women, youth, and the non-Moro indigenous peoples, be strengthened to enhance oversight, document potential violations, and promote transparency and accountability throughout the electoral process.

This election represents a significant turning point in the political settlement in the Bangsamoro. The candidates, their supporters, and the people, must stand together in safeguarding the integrity of the election and the Bangsamoro vote. Each ballot reflects not only the people's democratic choice but the collective commitment to achieving lasting peace in the region. ●

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¹¹ Security intensified in 27 red-category areas ahead of BARMM polls. Inquirer, 20 July 2026. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2266706/security-intensified-in-27-red-category-areas-ahead-of-barmm-polls>; Army to deploy over 2,000 soldiers for BARMM polls, GMA News, 23 July 2026. <https://www.gmanetwork.com/regionaltv/news/114929/army-to-deploy-over-2000-soldiers-for-barmm-polls/story/>



Climate Conflict Action Asia (CCA) is a peacebuilding organization dedicated to promoting sustainable and lasting peace by addressing the interconnected challenges of climate and conflict. Our work builds upon the legacy of our former identity as International Alert Philippines. Together with local communities, we monitor, analyze, and understand the dynamics of conflict, peace, and development in the Philippines to inspire action and solutions.



CCA manages the Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in communities that may lead to the eruption of violence. It is used by Early Response Network (ERN) in various localities in the Bangsamoro who share real-time information and work with key stakeholders in coordinating quick context-specific responses.