

Bangsamoro at a Crossroads: Persistent violence and socioeconomic challenges loom over the first Parliamentary election

Boto Mo Bangsamoro! Bulletin No. 3

CCAA and ERN election monitoring

Coverage: 13-31 August 2026

3 September 2026



Scene of the Crime Operatives (SOCO) conduct a forensic examination of one of Interim Chief Minister Abdulraof Macacua's convoy vehicles that was involved in the ambush in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte, on 15 August.

Photo courtesy of DXMS Radyo Bida Cotabato City

Political activities are in full swing, with parties conducting rallies, caravans, and assemblies to consolidate support ahead of election day. Yet beneath the vibrant campaign activities lie a more uncertain political landscape, marked by rising political tensions, insecurity, and questions over public confidence in the Bangsamoro political settlement.

Political tensions heighten

Political activities have intensified across the Bangsamoro as the campaign period enters its second half and the election draws nearer. The political climate shifted with the ambush of Bangsamoro Interim Chief Minister Abdulraof Macacua on 15 August. As previously assessed, the incident has driven a wedge further within the MILF and deepened the political polarisation in the region.¹ The incident appears to have sparked tensions among supporters of opposing parties and created a political climate where these rivalries could ignite into violence.

The effects were evident almost immediately. Just two days after the ambush, a man allegedly went to the residence of the opposing party’s supporter in Cotabato City and threatened him over his negative comment regarding the ambush. On 17 August, a bodyguard of a barangay chairman and a known political party supporter was shot dead just outside of his home in Brgy. Pamalian, Tugunan, Special Geographic Area.

Meanwhile, feuding between clans seemingly shows no end. While not directly election-related, some of the clan feuds either involve or are linked to local political actors. A councilor from Rajah Buayan was ambushed on 17 August in Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat. In a separate incident in Brgy Barurao, Sultan sa Barongis, the son of an MILF commander sustained three gunshot wounds, in a series of revenge attacks between their family and their rivals.

Other incidents of clan feuding and land-related violence occurred in the towns of Malabang and

Pualas in Lanao del Sur, and in Datu Abdullah Sangki and Shariff Saydona Mustapha in Maguindanao del Sur. In Brgy. Linantangan, Shariff Saydona, a recurring rido rooted in land conflict and involving an MILF commander erupted anew on 29 August, displacing around 30 families.

Meanwhile, warrants of arrest were issued against the mayor of Hadji Muhtamad in Basilan and seven others in connection to the ambush of the supporters of the former mayor during the 2025 midterm elections.² The timing of the warrants, issued just a month before the election, is notable given that the incumbent mayor has allied herself with the political camp opposing that of the governor. In Philippine politics, and evidently in the Bangsamoro, a governor’s ability to consolidate the support of their constituency is crucial to demonstrating political influence and maintaining power.

Puny gun ban

The relentless gun violence in the region is a testament to the ineffectiveness of the gun ban. Data from the Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) indicate that gun-related violence were higher during the implementation of the gun ban, with 58 incidents compared to 44 incidents over the same 45-day period before it took effect (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of gun-related violence, 6 weeks before and after the implementation of the gun ban.

	1 June-15 July 2026	16 July-31 Aug 2026
Incidents	44	58
Deaths	34	39

Gun-related violence has persisted despite heightened security measures and the sheer number of military deployments to secure the polls, leaving individuals vulnerable to gunfire and other forms of collective violence.

More troubling, the region’s dominant political party still has access to weapons, with no

¹ Climate Conflict Action. (19 August 2026). *Deepening political polarisation in the BARMM*. <https://conflictaalert.info/our-work/bulletins/58/deepening-political-polarisation-in-the-barmm>
² Court briefly halts arrest warrants vs Basilan town exec, co-accused. Inquirer, 25 August 2026. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2291784/court-briefly-halts-arrest-warrants-vs-basilan-town-exec-co-accused>

concrete steps towards decommissioning. *The Guidelines for Mutual Understanding for Ceasefire-related Functions* signed by the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on 31 August exposes the deeper dysfunction of the political settlement.³ It begs a more troubling question: why is there another ceasefire agreement when the peace agreement has already been signed?

To make matters worse, just two days after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, tensions were heightened in Kolambugan, Lanao del Norte when an MILF convoy, most of them fully armed, was blocked by the military. The military later reminded the MILF to coordinate its movements with the Bangsamoro peace process mechanisms.⁴

Extremist violence gaining ground

The threat of extremist violence also persists amidst the election environment. On 17 August, a drug leader who reportedly financed the Dawla Islamiyah (DI) was killed in a shootout after resisting arrest in Salvador, Lanao del Norte.

A week later, on 29 August, a suspected member of DI was killed alongside his wife and seven-month-old child during a serving of a warrant of arrest in Brgy. Tampilong, Marawi City. The warrant was supposed to be for a certain Khadafi Mimbasa alias “Engineer” who is said to be the mastermind behind the bombing in Mindanao State University in Marawi City in December 2023.⁵ Oddly, the military had previously announced two years before in February 2024 that they have neutralized the same person in a military operation.⁶

This incident follows the series of military operations targeting members of DI in Lanao del Sur that began early this year, which indicates the emergence of a new cohort of recruits, mostly among the youth. In fact, the death of the infant as a collateral casualty has already been used by extremist sympathisers as propaganda to garner sympathy and encourage further recruitment amidst election activities. This calls for strengthening monitoring and coordination mechanisms beyond the military to involve community groups and relevant agencies, such as human rights commissions, to ensure that emerging threats are identified early and addressed through timely and coordinated responses.



Scene of the Crime Operatives (SOCO) conduct a forensic examination at the site of a violent incident that killed three individuals, including a seven-month-old infant, in Brgy. Tampilong, Marawi City on 29 August 2026. Photo courtesy of Lanao del Sur Provincial Police Office.

This pattern of extremist violence is becoming increasingly ominous and could have major implications not only in the lead-up to the election but also beyond, particularly for the broader Bangsamoro political settlement as it risks triggering a new cycle of vertical violence.

³ GPH, MILF sign pact for peaceful BARMM polls. Inquirer. 31 August 2026. <https://www.inquirer.net/486890/gph-milf-sign-pact-for-peaceful-barmm-polls/>

⁴ AFP to MILF: Coordinate travel after convoy barred in Lanao Norte. Inquirer. 2 September 2026. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2297692/afp-to-milf-coordinate-travel-after-convoy-barred-in-lanao-norte/amp>

⁵ Suspect in MSU-Marawi Catholic Mass bombing killed – military. Inquirer. 31 August 2026. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2295773/suspect-in-msu-marawi-catholic-mass-bombing-killed-military>

⁶ MSU bombing ‘brains’ killed in encounter–AFP. Inquirer. 13 February 2024. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1903260/msu-bombing-brains-killed-in-encounter-afp>



Campaign paraphernalia have blanketed Cotabato City as campaign activities come in full swing, just two weeks before the first Bangsamoro Parliamentary Election. *Photo courtesy CCAA.*

Low public confidence in the election

Low public confidence in the election presents a significant risk to voter participation and ultimately, the credibility of the electoral process. In *Aksyon Alerto!*⁷ interviews with community members across the Bangsamoro, many expressed uncertainties over the voting process and procedures, which reflects unfamiliarity of an election unlike previous ones.⁸ Community members reported limited voter education activities in their areas and where such activities were conducted, some were reportedly used by political parties more as platforms for campaigning than to explain the voting process.

In another interview, a community member said they would rather rely on the electoral board to guide them through the voting process on election day.⁹ This is concerning as previous election seasons have demonstrated how the electoral board can be

pressured and manipulated by political groups to intimidate and influence voters.

A low voter turnout also poses a risk in the credibility of the election. In previous elections, people opt not to vote due to threats, harassments, and violence. However, the nature of the first Bangsamoro Parliamentary election may also contribute to lower participation. Unlike local elections where contests are often personal and shaped by kinship ties, the Parliamentary election involves choosing representatives to a regional legislature. This reduces the voters' sense of personal or familial stake in the election.

Low participation can also reflect a deeper lack of trust in the Bangsamoro government and those who are participating in the election, particularly among sectors and communities that have yet to experience tangible gains from the political

⁷ *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 8:00-9:00 AM on DXMS Radyo Bida 882 Cotabato City and Facebook Live broadcast on DXMS Radyo Bida and Climate Conflict Action.

⁸ Boto mo Bangsamoro sa *Aksyon Alerto!*: Episode 1245. (13 August 2026); Episode 1248. (18 August 2026); Episode 1254. (27 August 2026).

⁹ Boto mo Bangsamoro sa *Aksyon Alerto!*: Episode 1240. (06 August 2026); Episode 1243. (11 August 2026).

settlement.¹⁰ If voters are unconvinced that the new political system can meaningfully improve their lives, they will have little incentive to participate in the election.

Same security and socio-economic problems persist

The election is happening in the context of a troubled Bangsamoro transition. The region's ruling party is divided, and conditions have neither improved under any leadership in the past seven years.

During the debate among the thirteen political parties participating in the Bangsamoro Parliamentary election, much of the discussion centred on the same longstanding problems confronting the region, such as on the persistence of violence and lack of social services.¹¹

Violence remains unabated, with rivals continuing to settle scores through rido and tribal conflict and extremism gaining ground. The fact that voters are demanding security and that authorities

have resorted to heavy security deployments for the election is a stark indication of how violence has become deeply entrenched and effectively normalized during electoral cycles in the Bangsamoro.

Essential services also continue to fall short of expectations. Health facilities are subpar, while concerns over the quality of education persist, further compounded by unresolved corruption allegations involving the education bureau. While poverty has decreased, many communities are still faced with economic hardships.¹²

These are not new challenges. The election presents voters an opportunity to choose their leaders with concrete plans to address the region's longstanding problems. The Bangsamoro is at a crossroads. Unless sustainable and effective solutions are made to address the root causes of these problems, the Bangsamoro risks entering a new political chapter grappling with the same old challenges. ●

¹⁰ Unicef: BARMM children still 'left behind'. Inquirer. 21 February 2026, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2184763/unicef-barmm-children-still-left-behind; BARMM still deep in economic, political struggles 6 years into transition. The Varsitarian. 28 February 2025. https://varsitarian.net/barmm-still-deep-in-economic-political-struggles-6-years-into-transition/>

¹¹ The thirteen political parties participating in the first Bangsamoro Parliamentary Election faced off in a debate organised by the Independent Election Monitoring Centre – BARMM on 27 August 2026. The debate focused on three broad clusters of issues – economy and human development, peace and security, and good governance. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1P3dfLoaq1/>

¹² BARMM reduces poverty incidence to 12.8% in 2025. Manila Standard. 27 August 2026. <https://manilastandard.net/news/314784565/barmm-reduces-poverty-incidence-to-12-8-in-2025.html>



Climate Conflict Action Asia (CCAA) is a peacebuilding organization dedicated to promoting sustainable and lasting peace by addressing the interconnected challenges of climate and conflict. Together with local communities, we monitor, analyze, and understand the dynamics of conflict, peace, and development in the Philippines to inform action and solutions.



The Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), is an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in Muslim Mindanao that may lead to the eruption of violence. The Early Response Network (ERN) is an organisation of individuals in various localities in Muslim Mindanao who share real-time information on tensions and violence and work with key stakeholders in coordinating quick context-specific responses.