

CRITICAL EVENTS MONITORING SYSTEM BULLETIN

22 May 2019



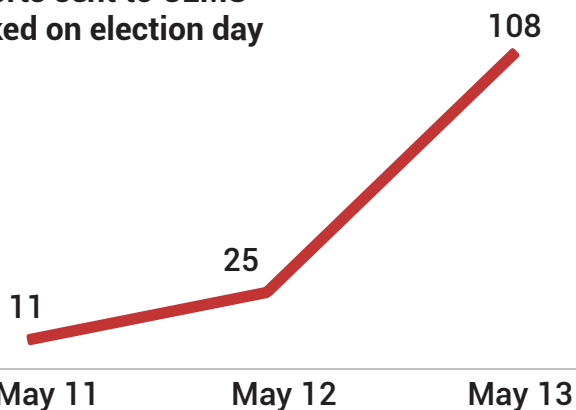
Fraud and Violence: Mainstays of Bangsamoro Electoral Politics

"Generally peaceful" was the Palace's assessment of the 13 May polls for national and local posts.¹ Nothing could be further from the truth, especially where Muslim Mindanao was concerned.

A total of 108 reports on election-related incidents were received on 13 May by International Alert Philippines's Critical Events Monitoring System, sent in by Early Response Network members stationed all over Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao including Cotabato City, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and parts of North Cotabato.²

A preview of election day, 11-12 May yielded a total of 36 reports, as anticipation among voters and heightened tensions among candidates and their supporters spurred reporting at a faster clip than in previous days.

The number of incident reports sent to CEMS spiked on election day



The two days before election day saw many voters returning to hometowns, candidates making their final appeals to voters, and candidates' supporters positioning themselves to gain the biggest advantage for their principals. Explosives were set off to sow fear among voters and poll workers and to preoccupy the police and military deputized by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to ensure order during the election.

Election day saw more explosions, and gunfights and fistfights between candidates' supporters and poll watchers. Voters lined up early, but election machine breakdowns tested their patience and stamina to overcome the sweltering heat and their own hunger. Their bigger complaint, however, was of disenfranchisement and fraud, allegedly committed by poll watchers and their own barangay officials.

Tensions and scare tactics

Candidates made use of the last day of the campaign period, 11 May, to sway voters. At the same time, vote-buying continued.

Looking forward to election day, voters made their way back to municipalities where they were registered to vote. Their vehicles jammed municipal and city roads. Traveling on the same roads were groups of people

¹ Pia Ranada, *Rappler*, *Malacañang lauds 'generally peaceful' 2019 elections*, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2019/230517-malacanang-lauds-generally-peaceful-2019-elections> (accessed on 17 May 2019.)

² International Alert Philippines set up the CEMS to gather real-time reports on tensions and violent conflicts in communities in the Bangsamoro. Reports are transmitted through SMS, stored in a database, and processed for deployment of context-specific responses by key stakeholders on the ground. Members of the ERN provide and also use the reports. They are autonomous individuals and members of groups with grassroots reach, who monitor disputes and harness traditional, formal, and hybrid institutions and arrangements to defuse or resolve violent conflicts. Among them are women and youth leaders.

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suspected of being 'flying voters', individuals carted from elsewhere to boost votes for candidates.

The police and military tightened security, while teachers, deputized as members of electoral boards, finalized preparations.

Tensions among candidates and their supporters boiled over. In Datu Unsay, Maguindanao, a grenade exploded on 11 May amid an influx of people believed to be flying voters to the town. A brawl broke out between supporters of two candidates for mayor on 11 May and again the next day near the polling precincts. In Malabang, Lanao del Sur, supporters of two candidates scuffled on 11 May after the testing of the vote counting machines (VCM).

Meanwhile, an explosion on the eve of election day ripped through an area at the back of the city hall in Cotabato City.

Machine failures and vote-rigging

The explosion in Cotabato City the previous night failed to dissuade voters, who trooped to polling precincts on 13 May even before these opened at 6 a.m. Majority were Muslims, whose only meal that day was before dawn, having gone on a fast this holy month of Ramadan. In Datu Odin Sinsuat municipality, there was an explosion at around 1 a.m. and again at around 7:30 a.m., but that did not suspend the voting there.

Reports indicated that voting did not start as scheduled in many towns, resulting in the buildup of voters, who got more and more impatient as they waited outside the precincts. When the precincts opened, the lines became unruly, with voters shoving against each other or trying to cut in line. Some women were crushed in Brgy. Wawalayan Calocan, Marawi City; a woman in Brgy. Rorogagus in the same city fainted. To put order to the lines, voting had to be momentarily stopped in Parang, Maguindanao, while in Bayang, Lanao del Sur, a soldier had to give a warning shot.

Technical failures were one reason for the slow-moving queues. Voter registration verification machines (VRVMs), used for the first time in the Bangsamoro provinces as part of a nationwide test and touted to thwart flying voters, broke down. Voter verification had to be done manually. VCMs also malfunctioned. In some precincts, ballots were spit out after they were fed into the VCMs. There was confusion among voters as to what to do next: wait until the VCMs were repaired or leave the ballots with members of the electoral boards? In Marawi City, ballots that were rejected by VCMs were reportedly "collected", raising the specter of cheating.

There were more blatant instances of vote-rigging, however, according to reports. Barangay officials partial for certain candidates reportedly stopped voters perceived to support the other candidates from entering the polling precincts and undertook the shading of ballots themselves. Same as barangay officials, poll watchers also reportedly checked the entry of voters to the precincts by letting in only those who would vote for their candidates. In other instances, they allegedly checked how the ballots were shaded. If the votes went to rivals, they purportedly discarded these ballots and filled up new ones. Poll watchers also purportedly offered money to voters in exchange for votes or withheld the marking pens unless voters chose their candidates. In worse cases, they reportedly used intimidation to force voters to vote for their candidates.

Scuffles broke out among candidates' supporters and poll watchers as they contested for votes. At least 20 such incidents were reported within and outside polling places in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Many got injured; a poll watcher in Jolo, Sulu for instance got stabbed. In Lumbatan, Lanao del Sur, a confrontation between supporters of two candidates for mayor resulted in at least one dead.

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Political rivalries continued to be violently played out elsewhere. In Ganassi, Lanao del Sur, shooting between groups of rival candidates for mayor injured four people who were travelling through town in a vehicle. Shootings were also reported in Marantao, Malabang, and Tubaran in Lanao del Sur, Parang in Maguindanao, and Panglima Estino in Sulu.

Nighttime did not bring any respite from the threats and violence. Between 6 and 7 p.m. in Wao, Lanao del Sur, a hand grenade was thrown and exploded at the back of an old building five meters near the polling precincts. At 10 p.m. in Cotabato City, another blast occurred where an explosion happened the previous night.

Postelection

The sheer number of incidents on 13 May culminated months of tensions among candidates jockeying for provincial, city, and municipal positions. These incidents were characterized by fistfights and the use of explosive devices, rather than the sort of gun battles that were a staple of previous electoral exercises.

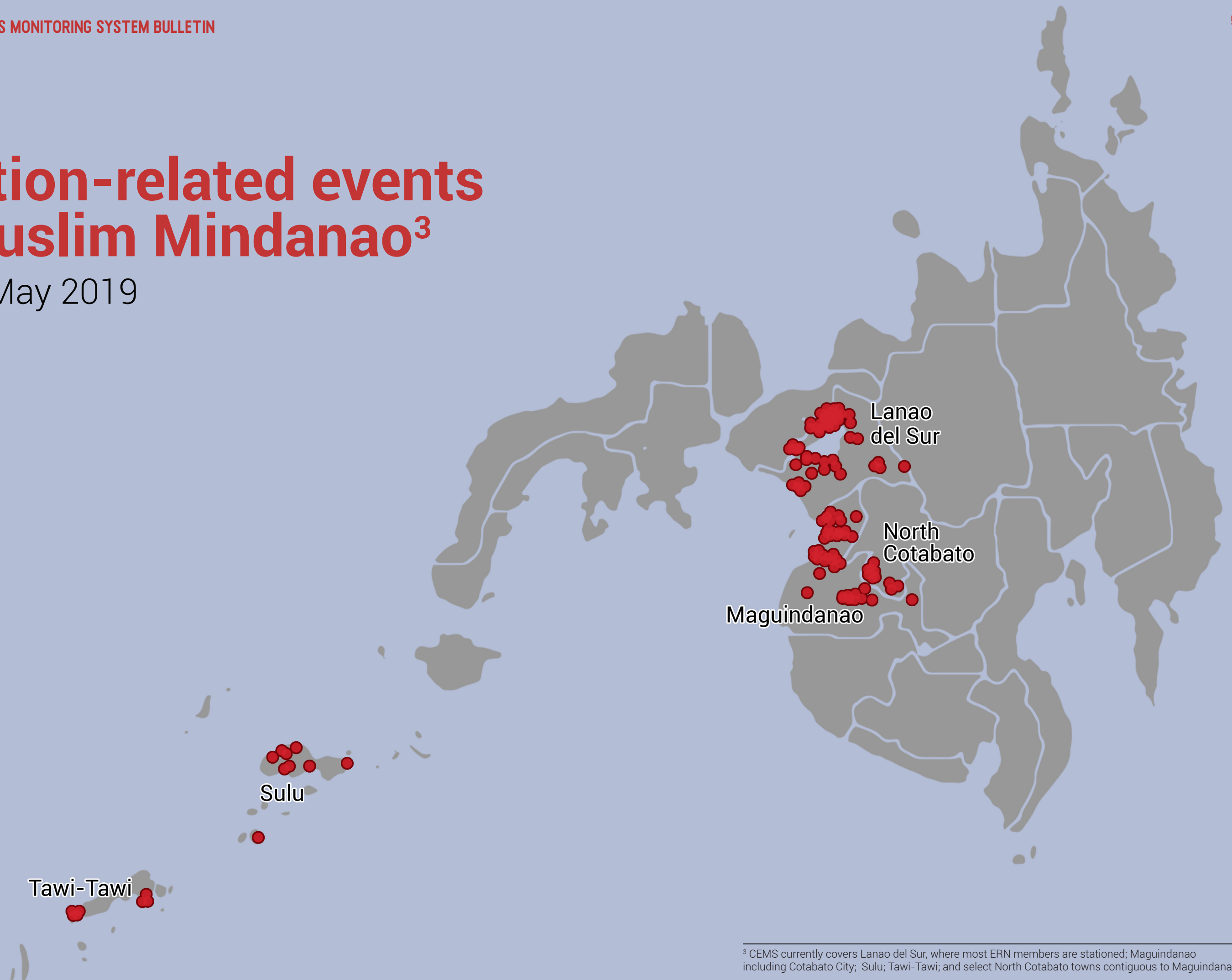
People claim that this was due to the strong military presence that effectively curbed the carrying and use of firearms. Martial law in the BARMM helped secure a less violent election, but it won't mark the end of violence originating from political rivalries in this part of Mindanao. The practice of exacting revenge makes grudges and feuds between individuals and families linger and fester, and disagreement over the election results by rivals or promises not kept between allies of convenience will beget new tensions and violence.

Hence, an important question in the postelection period is whether or not martial law will continue. A negotiated postelection settlement on the carrying and use of firearms agreed by various groups such as the security sector, leaders in the new Bangsamoro government, local government officials, traditional leaders, and civil society, will determine whether this is feasible or not. It can either lead to reconciliation or to a perpetuation of the violence.

Finally, the violence that attended the recent elections have created new strings of conflict as political conflict mutates into identity-based conflict. Indeed, fights between politicians are re-erupting as fights between clans. This will be seen in critical areas such as Lanao del Sur, especially in Marawi, and in Maguindanao, especially in Cotabato City. Local demand for more effective means to monitor and respond to conflict will rise in response to the flashpoints that occurred before, during, and after the elections in these places.

Election-related events in Muslim Mindanao³

11-13 May 2019



³ CEMS currently covers Lanao del Sur, where most ERN members are stationed; Maguindanao including Cotabato City; Sulu; Tawi-Tawi; and select North Cotabato towns contiguous to Maguindanao.

Marantao

- A stalled VCM triggered an argument among mayoral candidates' supporters. The paralegal of one candidate was eventually forced out of the polling precinct.
- A grenade exploded in a van along the highway, causing heavy traffic. The suspect, who was wounded in the explosion, was brought to the Amai Pakpak Medical Center in Marawi City for treatment.
- A gunfight was also reported. There were no known casualties.

Ganassi

- VCMs failed in at least two barangays.
- The brother of one of the mayoral candidates was shot at around 4 p.m. as he went to an upland barangay to see how the voting proceeded there. The suspect was believed to be a Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units member.
- By 5 p.m. or just before the polls closed, supporters of mayoral candidates exchanged gun fire. Four passengers of a vehicle passing through the town were injured. They were brought to the Amai Pakpak Medical Center in Marawi City.

Binidayan

A day before the election, vehicles jammed the municipal roads as residents returned to their towns to vote. On election day, a brawl broke out allegedly between the men of the town mayor and those of a candidate for the post. Seven of the mayor's men were injured and brought to the hospital.

Calanogas

On 11 May, five vehicles filled with suspected flying voters said to have come from Picong and Malabang were intercepted. They were allegedly threatened and beaten up before ordered to leave.

Malabang

- Mohamad Yahya Macapodi, candidate for mayor in Malabang town, filed a motion for reconsideration at the Comelec, which had issued a decision cancelling his candidacy. He accused his chief rival of propaganda.
- The camps of the two mayoral candidates reportedly had a confrontation after the testing of VCMs on 11 May and 12 May. In the 12 May incident, a child of the former vice-mayor of Pualas town was hurt. The family of the victim allegedly vowed to retaliate.
- A shooting incident took place on 13 May.

Ditsaan-Ramain

The town saw heavy traffic a day before 13 May.

Bubong

Members of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting were seen going about the town a day before the election.

Maguing

On election day, a brawl broke out between supporters of candidates for vice-mayor. An unspecified number got injured. The police broke up the fight.

Amai Manabilang

The day before election day, no violent conflicts were monitored. Teachers, policemen and soldiers were ready to do their duty. On election day, voting proceeded peacefully, even though VCMs malfunctioned. In this town, there was no competition for the posts of mayor, vice mayor, and councilors. There was only one candidate for mayor and for vice mayor – both surnamed Manabilang – and eight for councilors.

Lumbatan

A confrontation on election day between supporters of two of the candidates for mayor reportedly resulted in at least one dead.

Lumbayanague

At a military checkpoint on 11 May, two men were detained after they were discovered to have P50 bills stapled to *tarita*.⁵ One of them was a candidate for councilor in Butig. They were released on 12 May.

Lumbaca Unayan

By 12 May, election paraphernalia were reported ready for the election.

Butig

On election day, two men protested the exclusion of a candidate for town councilor in the voting. An argument ensued with soldiers stationed at the precinct. Irked, the soldiers hit them with their firearms.

Bayang

Soldiers had to fire warning shots as voters became restive due to the long and slow-moving queues. The VCMs had broken down.

Tubaran

A gunfight happened on election day. The former chairman of the Association of Barangay Councils was reportedly wounded.

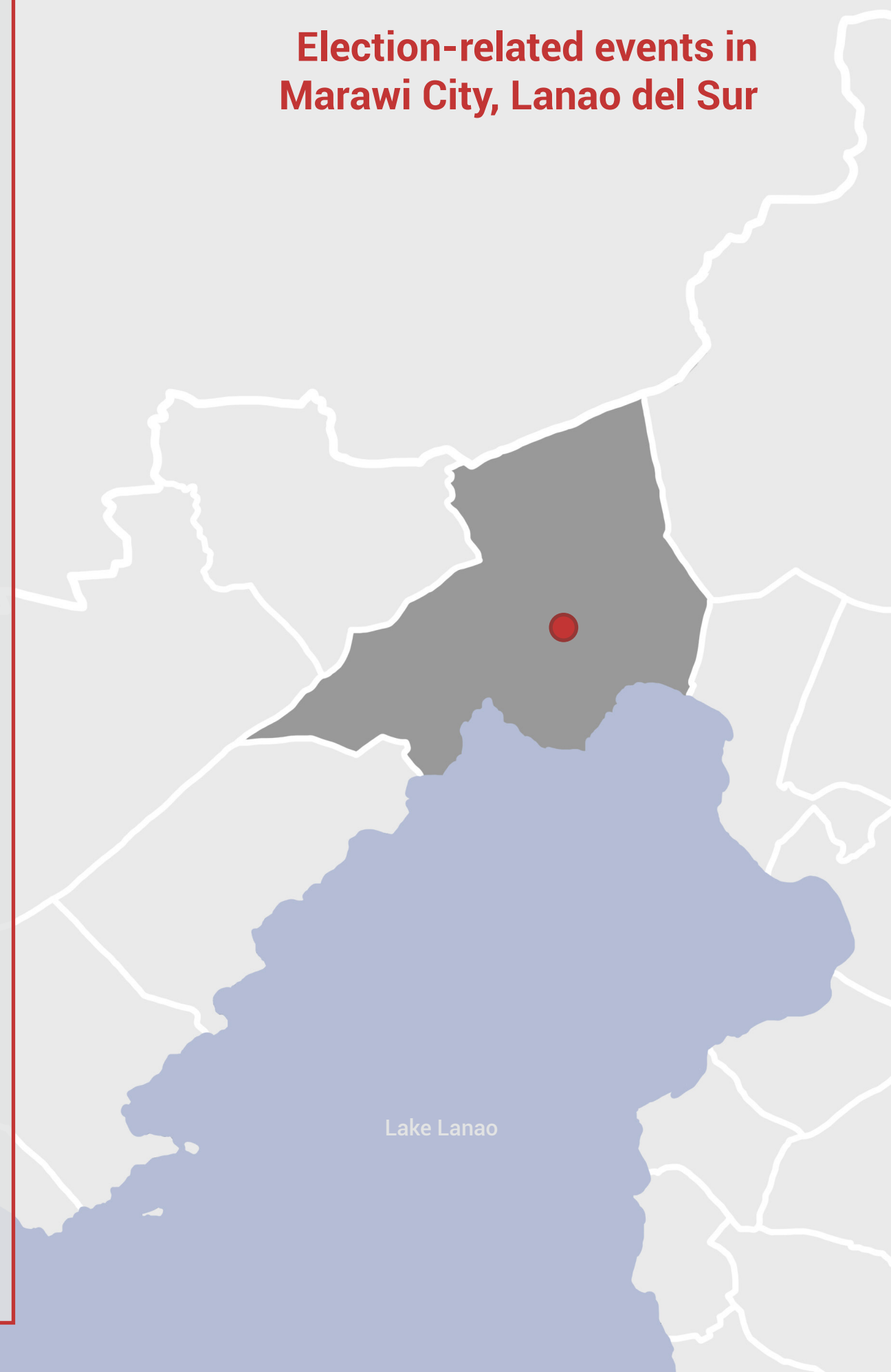
Wao

Between 6 and 7 p.m., a hand grenade was thrown and exploded at the back of an old building five meters near the polling precincts. No one got injured or was killed by the explosion. Some voters left but others who were still inside the precincts at that time continued to cast their votes. The police and Army investigated the incident.

⁵ A list of candidates.

- Talks of failure of elections raged days before 13 May.
- On 11 May, candidate for mayor Solitario Ali was seen campaigning at a masjid in Brgy. Basak Malutlut. Later, his group held a motorcade.
- On 12 May, heavy traffic was noted in Mapandi to 'ground zero' up to Basak area. A foreigner, a passenger in a white van, was held at the checkpoint in Tulali.
- The city saw an influx of people who came back from different areas to vote in Lanao del Sur. People suspected of being flying voters also came from other areas such as Iligan City, Cagayan de Oro City, Cotabato, Malabang, and Picong.
- On 12 May, a high-ranking city official, together with his right-hand man, visited a vice mayoral candidate allegedly to give his support. This official's sibling also ran for vice mayor but he allegedly gave his support to this other candidate.
- Vehicles laden with megaphones roamed the city to exhort against vote-buying. There were reports of P2,000 being paid to buy votes for candidates for provincial-level and legislative district representative positions.
- On 13 May, watchers started congregating around the city hall at 2 a.m. to await the release of ballots and other election materials.
- A common observation in many precincts was the delayed start of voting. As a result, large crowds who were on a fast were forced to wait under the heat of the sun. During voting in many precincts, the VRVMs and VCMs malfunctioned. Voter verification was done manually while the VCMs would not accept ballots. To keep the lines of voters moving, the ballots were reportedly left with members of the electoral boards. Although illegal, vote-buying was reported near polling precincts. Money was handed along with the *tarita*.
- In the Sagonsongan relocation site for families displaced by the Marawi war in 2017, VCMs were delivered at around 5 a.m., but voting was delayed. Voters, including mothers with children and senior citizens, lined up outside the precincts. The queues were slow-moving, triggering shoving and line-cutting among them. A brawl broke out among poll watchers, but the military who were present intervened. Other watchers reportedly forced voters to vote for their candidates. A tactic used was to hold on to the markers and to say they were letting the voters use these for as long as they vote for their candidates. Another tactic was to shame or embarrass voters into voting for their candidates.
- Elsewhere, watchers were monitored to have engaged in electioneering even inside the polling precincts. They allegedly cajoled and even forced voters to vote for certain candidates.
- The start of voting at the Bito Elementary School was delayed. Long lines caused tensions among voters, who stood under the heat of the sun. An argument among poll watchers started after one watcher shouted that "government employees could not be watchers".
- As of 8:35 a.m., voting had not yet started at Brgy. Wawalayan Calocan as the ballots were not yet delivered. Thick crowds had formed by that time. At 8:48 a.m., voting finally began, but this triggered pushing among voters. Some women were crushed.
- Voting was likewise delayed in Brgy. Rorogagus. Lines were slow-moving and voters were lined up under the sun. There was shoving among them. A woman who had not eaten collapsed. A watcher went berserk because the watcher of another candidate was reportedly a government employee. At least one VCM failed; ballots were spit out after they were fed into it. Voters asked if they could leave the ballots or if they should wait for the machines to be repaired.
- In Brgy. Marinaut West, a village official and his men created chaos. They shouted at people, and allegedly pushed out the watchers of 'Team Adiong' and prevented Adiong supporters from voting.
- At the Amai Pakpak Central Elementary School in Barrio Green, a fist fight broke out among supporters of mayoral candidates who were casting their ballots.
- A fight erupted between supporters of candidates for vice mayor inside the Mindanao State University. Some got injured. The police intervened.
- In Brgy. Lomidong, a village official reportedly ordered his men to fill ballots, disenfranchising voters. No one complained because the police were not around. A fight started when supporters of one of the candidates for mayor arrived.
- In Brgy. Bito Buadi Itowa, supporters of candidates, who happened to be relatives, shoved and shouted at each other.
- By nearly 6 p.m., many voters were still lined up in polling precincts to wait for their turn to vote. By around 10 p.m. of 13 May, the city had turned quiet to await the results of the polls.

Election-related events in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur



Election-related events in Maguindanao and Cotabato City

Cotabato City

- Police, led by the City Mobile Police Force Company and the regional police, tightened security the day before the election. They strictly implemented the no ID-no entry policy at entry points to the city.
- An explosion ripped through an area near the city hall at 10 in the evening of 12 May, and another bomb exploded on the night of 13 May.
- In Brgy. Rosary Heights 10, watchers identified with a barangay chairman and a barangay councilor reportedly refused to let people believed to be supporters of the rival camp enter a precinct. They let in only their voters, five at a time. This resulted in a scuffle, which only the police were able to stop.
- Also in Rosary Heights 10, men who had affiliated themselves with the Red team of mayoral candidate Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi and the Green team of rival Bai Sandra Sema reportedly claimed they were watchers, but no one actually knew them.
- In Rosary Heights 10, a brawl reportedly took place among the poll watchers of Guiani-Sayadi and Sema.
- A group of men who identified themselves as members of the Moro National Liberation Front were found milling around some precincts. They said they just wanted to "observe".

Matanog

In Brgy. Bugasan Sur, voting had not started as of 7:25 a.m. But voting proceeded peacefully once it did. In Brgy. Bugasan Norte, voters in long lines shoved at one another.

Barira

Voting was peaceful although lines were long and slow-moving, and voters wanted to get ahead of the others.

Buldon

Peaceful conduct of election was observed, except for taunting between supporters of candidates.

Parang

- Malfunctioning VRVMs and VCMs were reported in several barangays. This resulted in delays and slow-moving lines of voters, who pushed and shoved at each other or attempted to skip the queues. Voting had to be stopped to put order to the crowds.
- In Brgy. Nituan, gun shots were heard. Scared, some voters left the polling precincts.

Datu Piang

A fistfight erupted among candidates' supporters at the Datu Gumbay Piang Central Elementary School.

Pagalungan

A day before the election, two military tanks were stationed at the checkpoint in Pagalungan town. 105 cannons were placed in Brgy. Galakit and reportedly pointed towards Brgy. Kudal, the barangay of one of the mayoral candidates.

Datu Odin Sinsuat

Explosions occurred twice on election day: the first at 1 a.m. and the second at around 7:30 a.m.

Datu Unsay

- Tensions between supporters of two mayoral candidates intensified two days before the 13 May polls. On 11 May, supporters of one of the candidates allegedly prevented those of the other from getting watchers' IDs. On the night of 12 May, armed supporters of the two candidates met at the polling precincts. Five were reportedly wounded in the clash. In both cases, soldiers had to intervene to prevent further violence.
- There were also tensions allegedly between supporters of another mayoral candidate and a party over the issue of vote-buying and carting in voters from other places in Maguindanao to vote in the town. One got hurt in the melee.
- Two grenades also exploded on 11 May, but it was not clear who fired them. Supporters of the mayoral candidates charged each other of bringing in flying voters from elsewhere in Maguindanao and of vote-buying.
- Fear pervaded among voters, who did not know what would happen next. Voting started late at around 7 a.m. Malfunctioning VRVMs and VCMs were reported. Cheating was suspected. In one of the barangays, voters were allegedly not allowed to go inside the polling precincts. Instead, ballots were reportedly filled by men upon orders of a barangay official affiliated with one of the mayoral candidates.

Upi

The VCMs in several precincts conked out.

Mamasapano

Voting reportedly went smoothly in this town.

Election-related events in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi

Sapa-Sapa

- An argument ensued between an election officer and a poll watcher after this watcher and others loyal to one candidate reportedly surrounded another watcher who had been asked by a voter for assistance. This voter was supportive of the other candidate. The first set of watchers took a photo of this voter's ballot, which is prohibited.
- Two supporters of the candidates for mayor exchanged accusations of vote-buying. The barangay chairman mediated and settled the discussion.
- A scuffle ensued among watchers of the candidates for mayor. One of the watchers affiliated with one of the candidates reportedly did not agree with another watcher affiliated with another candidate giving assistance to voters. The police and military assigned to the precinct mediated and settled the issue.

Bongao

On election day, voting went smoothly, although it was delayed due to the breakdown of VRVMs.

Indanan

Supporters of a candidate for mayor allegedly went inside the precincts to check the ballots filled up by voters. If the vote went to the rival, they reportedly set aside the ballot, took a blank ballot, and filled that in favor of their candidate.

Jolo

A brawl broke out between watchers in Brgy. Walled City, while a watcher was stabbed in Brgy. Alat.

Patikul

A brawl erupted between supporters of two parties.

Panglima Estino

Voting in Brgy. Tiptipon was interrupted by a gunfight.

Maimbung

On 13 May in Brgy. Tandu Patong, verification of voters was done manually. A village official reportedly prevented people from voting.

Siasi

An argument broke out between supporters of different candidates.

Omar

Many voters who had lined up were unable to vote by the time the polling precincts closed by 6 p.m.

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Election-related events in North Cotabato

Midsayap

As of 12 May, polling precincts were observed to be ready for the election. The police had been on alert for three days already. On election day, voting was ongoing by 6:52 a.m., and by that time, many had arrived at the polling precincts. Voting was orderly, with priority given to senior citizens, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities. No untoward incidents were reported by the time voting had finished.

Pikit

VCMs in at least two barangays conked out. A supporter of a mayoral candidate was spotted reportedly vote-buying. He was mauled by supporters of another candidate. Meanwhile, a supporter of a candidate for mayor reportedly entered a precinct without providing proper identification.

International Alert's Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS) is an SMS-based reporting system that captures conflict incidents and tensions in communities that may or may not lead to the eruption of violence. It is used by its Early Response Network (ERN), a group of men and women in various localities in the Bangsamoro, who share real-time information and work with local governments, key agencies, the security sector, and religious and traditional leaders in coordinating quick and context-specific responses to tensions, violent conflicts, disasters, and displacement, as they happen. Command posts are led by our local partners TASBIKKa, Inc., ERN Lanao del Sur, MARADECA, Inc., and Lupah Sug Bangsamoro Women Association, Inc.



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