

# CRITICAL EVENTS MONITORING SYSTEM BULLETIN

12 May 2019



## Propaganda, vote-buying, and intimidation amid the election campaign

In a resolution on March 19, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) declared the whole of Mindanao as a 'red' election hotspot, judging from violence in the past two elections, and threats posed by armed groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Abu Sayyaf Group, the New People's Army as well as rogue members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front.<sup>1</sup> A red hotspot classification constitutes a warning the election could be interrupted and gives the Comelec the power to put an area under its control and direct the augmentation of the police and armed forces.

Violence has always marred the run-up, the actual conduct of elections, and the post-election situation in Mindanao, particularly in the Muslim Mindanao region. Conflict Alert, International Alert Philippines's conflict monitoring system for violent conflicts in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and the cities of Cotabato and Marawi, recorded 40 election-related incidents in 2013, 29 in 2016, and 47 in 2018.<sup>2</sup> National and local elections were held in May 2013 and barangay elections later in October. National and local elections were again held in 2016. The oft-postponed synchronized barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections pushed through in May

2018, with delayed polls held in Marawi City in September. Assassinations, shootings, abductions, bombings, clashes, arson, threats and intimidation, harassment, physical altercations, gun ban violations, vote-buying, and ballot snatching had attended these electoral exercises. The number of deaths resulting from election-related violence totaled 16 in 2013, 13 in 2016, and 10 in 2018 while the number of people injured summed up to 32 in 2013, 19 in 2016, and 32 in 2018. Election-related violence was particularly fatal during the election months.

This year's poll is shaping up to be no different based on incident reports collected through the Critical Events Monitoring System (CEMS), Alert's SMS-based, real-time mechanism for gathering reports about tensions and violent conflicts in communities in the Bangsamoro.<sup>3</sup> Alert's Early Response Network (ERN) across the Bangsamoro used the CEMS platform to report these incidents.<sup>4</sup>

A total of 43 reports covering Cotabato City and Lanao del Sur were collected from 28 March (a day before the official start of the campaign period for local candidates) to 10 May (a day before the end of the campaign period for both national and local candidates). They depicted a campaign

<sup>1</sup> COMELEC, *Resolution 10510: "In the matter of declaring some areas as election hotspots - Category Red and further amending Resolution No. 10481, entitled 'In the matter of placing some areas in the country under COMELEC control; and establishment of COMELEC command center for purposes of the May 13, 2019 National and Local Elections (NLE),' as amended"*, Manila, 19 March 2019.

<sup>2</sup>The 2011-2017 dataset can be downloaded from [www.conflictaalert.info](http://www.conflictaalert.info). The 2011-2018 dataset will be available by middle of this year.

<sup>3</sup> CEMS enables critical information to be transmitted in real-time and be quickly processed and stored in a database for deployment of context-specific response by key stakeholders on the ground.

<sup>4</sup> The ERN is a network of autonomous groups, organizations, and individuals with the strong and active participation of women and youth leaders, working in the community to monitor violent conflict and to harness traditional, formal, and hybrid institutions and arrangements to resolve disputes and prevent violent conflict.

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period characterized by intense political rivalries that saw candidates and their supporters engage in mudslinging, vote-buying, intimidation and threats, harassment, physical fights, and violence with the use of firearms.

Candidates, with the participation of their supporters, channeled propaganda through social media – as well as two-way radio – to campaign against their rivals. Campaign materials were a source of friction, as they and their supporters fought over where these could be posted. Conflicts were noted as early as 28 March and up to the last week of the campaign period.

Vote-buying was observed in Cotabato and Marawi cities and in different towns in Lanao del Sur beginning in April and up to May. Offers ranged from a low of P300 to a high of P3,000. Vote-buying fueled violence, particularly among candidates' supporters and resulted in charges filed by candidates against rivals. Meanwhile, an increase in purchases of consumer items such as cellphones and even motorcycles was observed, likely as a result of the additional cash in voters' pockets.

Over the same period, threats, intimidation, and harassment were employed by candidates or their supporters to make voters pledge their support for certain candidates. Physical attacks or gunfire punctuated arguments between candidates or their supporters.

In Cotabato, while there were few reported election-related incidents, the rivalry between two candidates for city mayor – Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi, the incumbent, and Bai Sandra

Sema, Maguindanao first legislative district representative – became intense, prompting Sema on 31 March to oppose the lifting of Comelec control over the city.<sup>5</sup> A proposed peace covenant signing by the two was reportedly rejected by Guiani-Sayadi.

It was not solely a picture of tensions and violence during the campaign period, however. There were also peaceful rallies and campaigns. Candidates in Lanao signed a peace covenant in late April to pledge to peaceful campaigning and an orderly election on 13 May. In Marawi, a debate among some of the candidates for mayor discussed issues such as the city's rehabilitation after the war in 2017 and the sustained war on drugs.

Much is riding on the outcome of the election in the Bangsamoro tomorrow. As the region transitions from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, following the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, and as Marawi attempts to rise from the devastation wreaked by the 2017 war, it will need government officials who will work towards security, stability, and growth. The election provides the opportunity for voters to choose so.

Tomorrow, the ERN in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, the island provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and Cotabato City will monitor the conduct of the election and report fact-based and accurate information on incidents as they happen, to help dispel misinformation and enable multifaceted responses to manage tensions and address violence. A post-election bulletin will be issued.

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<sup>5</sup> Comelec had taken control of Cotabato City after a New Year's Eve bombing that killed two to ensure the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law on 21 January and 7 February and the election on 13 May take place.

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This bulletin is based on the ERN reports below, which were collected from 28 March to 10 May 2019.

### Peace and Order

- In Cotabato City, an increase in criminal activities was noted at the start of the campaign period for local candidates (29 March). But there were few election-related incidents.
- Bai Sandra Sema, candidate for Cotabato City mayor, requested Comelec to retain control of the city.
- In Marawi City, heavier traffic was experienced.
- The polling precinct in Marantao, Lanao del Sur was reportedly transferred from the gym to the Daanaingud Bacong Elementary School. Lack of information about this move could result in disenfranchisement among voters.
- A "lawless group" has been allegedly hired to create chaos during election day in Marantao.

### Campaign Activities

- In Malabang, Lanao del Sur, a barangay chairman and his uncle came to blows after the chairman refused the posting of a tarpaulin of his uncle's mayoral candidate in his area.
- In Cotabato City, candidate for mayor Bai Sandra Sema's posters in some barangays were torn down. Witnesses said those who did it were men wearing bonnets and believed to be hired by the opposition.
- Allegedly doctored photos showing incumbent Lanao del Sur vice-governor Mamintal Adiong Jr. clutching money and accusing him of vote buying, have circulated in Facebook. Adiong is running for provincial governor as well as seven others. Believed to be behind the social media posts were other candidates for governor.
- Members of the Saksi Radio Forum in Lanao del Sur used two-way radios to defend their candidates. Three were particularly harsh, with exchanges becoming personal.
- In Lumbaca-Unayan town located south of Lake Lanao, rivals of the incumbent mayor running for reelection allegedly gave him "negative feedback".
- In Marawi City, five of nine candidates for mayor, including the incumbent Majul Gandamra, joined a debate on 14 April. They discussed issues on transparency, youth, disaster resilience, rehabilitation of the city, and the government's war on drugs. The four others were Johairah Conding, Pundug Laguindab, Datu Meno Manabilang and Mayan Saidamen-Basman.
- Vice President Leni Robredo visited Marantao town and Marawi City on 23 April and made use of these occasions to campaign for the opposition Otso Diretso candidates.
- In Marawi, candidate for vice-mayor Kasarungan Marabur and allied candidates for city councilor held a rally and concert on 23 April at Area 1 of the Sagonsongan temporary housing site for families displaced by the Marawi war.
- Also in Marawi, candidate for mayor Khomeini Taha and allied candidates for city councilor held a rally at Brgy. Datu Saber on 24 April.
- In Butig town, a grand rally held on 29 April was thrown by mayoral candidate Dimnatang Pansar, the incumbent. It was attended by candidates comprising 'Team Pansar' and 'Team Adiong' as well as candidates for district representative.
- In contiguous towns Amai Manabilang, Maguing, and Wao, the campaigning proceeded peacefully.
- A letter circulated the news that Comelec has cancelled the candidacy of Mohamad Yahya Macapodi, who is running for mayor in Malabang town. Macapodi's camp blamed a rival for this letter and clarified that the decision was not immediately executory as it had appealed the Comelec decision.

### Vote-buying

- Politicians accused of vote-buying included incumbent officials running for reelection in Marawi and Cotabato cities and Lanao del Sur.
- Prices offered in Cotabato and Marawi cities and Lanao del Sur varied widely: from a low of P300 to a high of P3,000.
- Violence stemming from vote-buying was recorded in Marawi City and in Marantao town. In Marawi, a man was stabbed while in Marantao, an alleged supporter of a mayoral candidate was slapped.
- A case was filed against a mayoral candidate in Lumbaca-Unayan town in Lanao del Sur by another candidate because of vote-buying.
- In Marawi, sales of motorcycles and cellphones have gone up, believed to be fueled by vote-buying.

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### Political Rivalry

- In Cotabato City, Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi, vying for reelection, reportedly refused to sign a peace covenant with rival Bai Sandra Sema.
- In Marawi City, a barangay chairman was allegedly told by her brother to ensure that his candidate for mayor win in her village. She reportedly refused because she supports the incumbent mayor, Majul Gandamra. Thereafter, her supporters complained of being harassed and threatened by the brother.
- In Taraka town in Lanao del Sur, a candidate for the provincial board belonging to the slate of Mamintal Adiong Jr. reportedly accused a fellow candidate of actually supporting Adiong's rival.
- In Malabang town, two alleged supporters of two rival candidates traded gunfire. The police mediated.
- In Lumbatan municipality, two of 12 candidates for mayor had an altercation.
- In Marantao municipality, an alleged supporter of a mayoral candidate reportedly punched the supporter of another mayoral candidate.
- In Bayang town, a district representative wanted his cousin to support his candidate for mayor. His supporters allegedly sprayed with bullets a vehicle, containing his cousin's allies, to force the cousin to switch sides.
- In Ganassi town, a tenant was allegedly threatened with eviction if he did not support his landlord's candidate for mayor.
- Teachers based in Picong municipality reportedly failed to have their statement of assets, liabilities, and net worth signed by the Education department superintendent, who ordered them to support his candidate for district representative.
- On 26 April, a peace covenant signing among candidates for municipal mayor and other positions in Lanao del Sur was held in Camp Ranao in Marawi City in a bid to ensure an orderly and peaceful election on 13 May.

### Law Enforcement

- The house of Mayor Ramon Piang in Upi, Maguindanao was raided on 16 April for firearms.
- An escort of Fiat Macarambon, who is vying to be the Lanao del Sur first legislative district representative, was detained at the 82nd Infantry Battalion in Lanao del Sur on 26 April.

*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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