



## EUROPEAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION



THE PHILIPPINES  
National Midterm Elections, 12 May 2025

### Voters' commitment to democracy marred by systemic deficiencies

**Manila, 14 May 2025** – “On 12 May, Filipino voters went to the polls, demonstrating a strong commitment to democracy and civic values, despite the persistence of vote-buying, which the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) only partially addressed through regulations and initiatives” said **Chief Observer Marta Temido** during a press conference in Manila, where she presented the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) Preliminary Statement.

She recalled that following a formal invitation from the Philippines to observe the 2025 National Midterm Elections, the European Union has deployed an EOM with the mandate to observe all aspects of the electoral process. “As per the EU’s methodology, the EU and Filipino authorities signed an Administrative Arrangement setting the basis for the Mission, granting the EU EOM and its members ‘freedom of access, at any time, to all polling stations and counting/tabulation centres,’ and also ensuring that all mission’s members shall abide by the COMELEC’s International Election Observer Accreditation Guidelines and the EU EOM Code of Conduct” she explained.

“The elections took place against the backdrop of a continued dominance of few political families in the lists of candidates, detracting from overall competitiveness. The process was also marred by election-related violence, including on election day,” the Chief Observer added. Despite that, the campaign was vibrant and media coverage pluralistic, both which enhanced voter’s ability to make an informed choice.

“EU observers witnessed several credible indications and received reports of vote-buying through cash and goods, as well as partisan distribution of welfare payouts (*ayuda*). Violent incidents marred the election process in some parts of the country, including through at least 30 killings of candidates and election officials” Ms Temido noted. While violence was more prevalent in local rather than national elections, “it influenced the overall atmosphere, resulting in widespread intimidation in several provinces”.

“Violence during an election is utterly unacceptable, particularly when it results in the loss of dozens of lives. A democratic electoral process should never be associated with such tragic incidents” said **Vladimir Prebilič**, Head of the Delegation of the European Parliament that joined the EU EOM and fully endorsed its statement.

COMELEC ensured the timely preparation of polling stations and the deployment of automated counting machines (ACMs) and ballots. EU EOM observers found COMELEC’s regional, provincial, city, and municipal branches to be experienced and competent. COMELEC’s public communication efforts were proactive and diverse, and for the first time included the distribution of personalised voter information sheets to all registered voters.

Disregarding prior commitments, COMELEC’s assertions that EU observers were not allowed in the voting precincts undermined the EU EOM’s ability to observe voting procedures. As a result, the EU EOM could no longer ensure meaningful observation of the voting phase in all polling stations during the voting hours. Consequently, the Mission did not deploy its full team of observers as originally planned.

Although a limited number of EU observers were able to observe voting in some precincts, the mission is not in a position to assess the voting process in line with its methodology. Nevertheless, after the close of polls, the EU EOM deployed 82 teams in 92 polling precincts across the country. In eight of them they were denied access.

The legal framework provided the basis for holding democratic elections, but it is dispersed across multiple laws that have largely superseded the 1985 Omnibus Election Code, with nearly half of its provisions no longer applicable, creating confusion and undermining legal certainty, as it is the case with provisions on election observation.

Based on COMELEC’s broad discretionary powers to reject or cancel candidacies, two thirds of the 184 candidate applications for the Senate, and 20 out of 635 candidacies for the House of Representatives district seats were rejected. The absence of clear deadlines for resolving disputes related to candidate and party-list registration undermined both the right to an effective remedy and the right to stand for election. In addition, in approximately 20 per cent of the district races, candidates ran unopposed, typically the incumbents, limiting genuine pluralistic competition and voter choice.

*The EU EOM has been present in the Philippines since 28 March 2025 following an invitation from the COMELEC. Its mandate was to assess the entire electoral process against the Philippines’s constitution, laws and international commitments for democratic elections. The EU EOM deployed 226 observers from EU member states, Canada, Norway and Switzerland. This preliminary statement is delivered prior to the completion of the election process. The EU EOM remains in country to observe post-election developments and will publish a final report, containing detailed recommendations, within two months of the conclusion of the electoral process.*

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