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Elections in the Philippines

May 13 National and Local Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Philippine elections authorities as of May 9, 2013, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Election Day will be on May 13, 2013; it will be simultaneously held in more than 70,000 precincts nationwide. Voting is between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Voters within 30 meters of the polling place who have not cast their vote by 7:00 p.m. will be allowed to cast their vote without interruption. A list of all voters who were allowed to vote after 7:00 p.m. will be kept by the Board of Election Inspectors.

Who are Filipinos voting for on Election Day?

Elections for national and local posts will happen simultaneously.

Candidates are competing for 12 senatorial seats, 234 district representatives in Congress,¹ 57 seats for party lists,² 80 governors/vice governors, 766 board members, 143 city mayor/vice mayors, 1,598 city councilors, 1,491 municipal mayors/vice mayors, approximately 11,932 city/municipal councilors, one Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao regional governor/vice regional governor and 24 regional assembly representatives (three per legislative district: Lanao del Sur – two districts; Maguindanao – two districts; Sulu – two districts; Basilan – one district; Tawi-tawi – one district).

Who can vote in the Philippines?

Only qualified voters who registered in their precinct of residence may vote.

Who is qualified to register?

Every citizen of the Philippines who is not disqualified by law, is 18 years of age or older, a resident of the Philippines for at least one year and is living in the place wherein he or she proposed to vote for at least six months prior to the election is qualified to register.

How many registered voters are there in the Philippines?

As of January 2013, the total number of registered voters for the May 2013 elections stood at 52,014,648.

¹ Data as of 2011 may have increased due to the creation of new congressional districts.

² Data as of 2011 may have increased in relation to increased total number of seats. Under constitutional provisions, the proportional representation tier must comprise 20 percent of total seats. While the constitution has provided for a 250-member House since its implementation in 1987, it also permits the legislature to change that size. Numbers above reflect the current apportionment.

What is the structure of the Philippine government?

The Philippines is a presidential democracy, with President Benigno Simeon Aquino III currently serving as the Head of State until 2016. The bicameral Congress is made up of the Senate, with 24 seats, and the House of Representatives, with 287 seats.

The President is elected by plurality vote to serve a six-year term. In the Senate, 24 members are elected by plurality vote in multi-member constituencies to serve six-year terms.

Half of the members of the Senate are elected at-large nationally every three years. Electors may cast up to 12 votes for the Senate race. In the House of Representatives, 230 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies to serve a three-year term, and 57 members are elected at-large nationally through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve the same three-year term.

What is the election management body in the Philippines?

The Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) is the constitutional office independent of executive, legislative and judicial supervision. It performs both administrative and quasi-judicial functions relative to ensuring that elections remain free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible.

The COMELEC is led by one Chairperson and six commissioners. The Chairperson has direct supervision of all administrative departments to ensure the proper discharge of constitutionally-appointed functions and powers. By virtue of election supervision and administration, the COMELEC establishes the smallest territorial unit called a precinct.

In 2010, the COMELEC established 333,270 precincts. It has clustered these to 76,437. In 2013, the COMELEC established 344,539 and clustered these to 77,829 for purposes of automated elections.

What are the powers of the Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC)?

The Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) has several key functions. This body enforces and administers all laws and regulations relative to the conduct of elections. The COMELEC exercises exclusive jurisdiction over all contests relating to elections, returns and qualifications of all elected regional, provincial and city officials. They also have appellate jurisdiction over contests involving elected municipal officials decided by trial courts of general jurisdiction, or involving elected *barangay* (village) officials decided by trial courts of limited jurisdiction.

The COMELEC settles all questions affecting elections, including the number and location of polling places; appointment of election officials and inspectors; and registration of voters. However, this body does not make decisions regarding who does and does not have the right to vote.

This body also authorizes law enforcement agencies and government bodies, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines, to ensure free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible elections.

Finally, the COMELEC registers political parties, organizations and coalitions. In addition to other requirements, the aforementioned groups must present their platform or program initiatives to the COMELEC before gaining official status.

The COMELEC also accredits citizens' arms of the Commission on Elections.

What is an accredited citizen arm?

An accredited citizen arm is any impartial, nonpartisan election-related civil society group that has applied for accreditation with the Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC).

Accreditation means the organization will be subject to direct supervision and control by the COMELEC and will comply with all lawful orders in the performance of its specific functions and activities as provided in Section 52(K) of the omnibus election code, and such other functions and activities that the commission may assign.

What is an election watcher?

Election watchers are persons authorized to witness election proceedings inside a polling place. They may represent candidates, registered political parties and citizens' arms. Each appointed watcher has the right to witness the proceedings of the Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) while they stay in the designated area; take notes and photos of the proceeding; file a protest against any irregularity or violation of law they believe may have been committed by the BEI; obtain a certificate of the filing and resolution of a protest from the BEI; and receive copies of reports of election results, as provided for by law.

Duly authorized watchers have a right to observe proceedings at all levels and may be allowed to observe key preparatory proceedings conducted by the Philippine Election Commission, such as ballot printing; shipment and packaging; and random manual auditing, among others.

What is a precinct? What is a polling place?

A precinct refers to the basic unit of territory established by the Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) for the purpose of voting. A precinct has a maximum of 200 voters.

A polling place refers to the location where the Board of Election Inspectors conducts their work and voters cast their ballots. For purposes of the automated elections, up to five precincts will be clustered in one polling place. Due to limited number of precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines available, the COMELEC will cluster precincts to ensure a maximum of 1,000 voters per precinct so that one machine is assigned to each cluster.

How many polling centers are set up on Election Day?

At least one polling center per *barangay* (village) will be set up nationwide; there are 42,026 *barangays* across the Philippines. Special polling centers for overseas workers will be established in embassies and consular offices. Special polling places will also be established inside jail facilities that have 50 or more registered voters. Accessible polling places will also be established within *barangay* polling centers for persons with disabilities.

How long is the campaign period in the Philippines?

National candidates (senators and party list candidates) campaign for 90 days prior to Election Day. Local candidates (congressional representatives down to councilors) may campaign for 45 days prior to Election Day, according to Republic Act No. 7166.

Are Filipinos working abroad allowed to vote?

Yes. By virtue of Republic Act No. 9189, duly registered overseas Filipino workers are allowed to participate in national elections through overseas voting either through postal voting (mail) or casting a ballot in person at a diplomatic post.

In seven diplomatic posts: Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuwait, Riyadh, Jeddah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, voters will cast their ballots via preprinted ballots using the automated election system. Registered voters may only cast their ballots for national positions (senators and party list).

What technology will be used in the 2013 elections?

The Philippine Election Commission will use precinct count optical scan technology that was used in the 2010 elections.

What is precinct count optical scan technology?

The precinct count optical scan (PCOS) system is technology that accepts paper ballots on which the names of candidates are pre-printed. After a voter shades ovals next to the names of candidates he or she wishes to vote for, the voter will feed the double-sided paper into an automated counting machine (ACM). Counting of votes will be done in the precinct.

There will be one PCOS machine or ACM for every clustered precinct (up to 1,000 voters per precinct). The PCOS machine will scan both sides of the paper ballot in a single pass, and the ACM stores a digital image of every ballot cast.

Where is voting, counting and canvassing held?

Polling places are inside voting centers and usually located in public school buildings within the territorial jurisdiction covered. Counting is conducted in the same venue immediately after the close of polls and once all voters allowed to cast their ballot have done so. The results will be generated by a precinct count optical scan machine and 30 copies of the report will be printed for distribution to national and local parties; citizens' arms; media; boards of canvassers; and the Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) central office. One copy will be posted for public viewing and one copy will be kept inside the ballot box.

Canvassing is the consolidation of results to be aggregated at a higher level. This includes precinct results aggregated at the municipal/city board of canvassers; municipal/city results aggregated at the provincial board of canvassers; or provincial/city results aggregated at the regional or national board of canvassers.

Local boards of canvassers are headed by a COMELEC field official and will convene at 6:00 p.m. on Election Day. Their main responsibilities are to receive and consolidate electronically-transmitted results, print the reports, proclaim the winners and transmit results. Proclamation of candidates – municipal, city, provincial or regional – is done at the respective board of canvassers.

Canvassing and proclamation for senators and party lists are conducted in Manila with the COMELEC sitting En Banc as the National Board of Canvassers.

Can visiting foreigners observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Yes. The Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) has released guidelines and rules on the accreditation of foreign observers. The details and requirements are contained in COMELEC Resolution No. 9652.³

³ COMELEC Resolution No. 9652.

<http://www.pia.gov.ph/news/piafiles/comelec9652.pdf?iframe=true&width=100%&height=100%>

Resources

- [Official COMELEC website](#)
- [Constitution of the Philippines, 1987](#)
- [Omnibus Election Code or Batas Pambansa Blg. 881](#)
- [Republic Act No. 7166](#)
- [Republic Act No. 9189](#)
- [COMELEC Resolution No. 9618](#)
- [COMELEC Resolution No. 9640](#)
- [COMELEC Resolution No. 9648](#)
- [COMELEC Resolution No. 9652](#)